THE SUCCESSFUL FOUNDER

Your Guide To Building A Successful Business & Creating The Life You Desire

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EDITOR'S LETTER

DEAR READER,

Welcome to the Spring 23 edition of The Successful Founder Magazine.

This issue focuses on fabulous female founders and their inspirational journeys. You'll also find a wealth of useful and inspirational features on everything from buiding your social media presence, being the best leader you can be, embracing new ways of working, reducing stress and more.

In addition to reading our digital and print magazines, do also visit us online at www.thesuccessfulfounder.com for daily new articles, and join us on our socials – details below.

Finally if you've any suggestions or great stories to tell, we'd love to hear from you. Drop us a note on team@thesuccessfulfounder.com.

My very best wishes,

LISA
EDITOR

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team@thesuccessfulfounder.com

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What's the value of a career plan for entrepreneurs?

Many people build a successful career and then claim they never had a career plan. You might assume that means you don't need such a plan. What you are not hearing is the many people who also never had a plan and, as a result, didn't reach dizzy heights of success but meandered through their career and found themselves dissatisfied.

It's true that the world of work is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous at the moment. All you can really count on is change. That doesn't mean you don't need to plan your career path and plan for your future.

Entrepreneurs need a plan, and it has to be flexible. A plan is a framework to build upon, it sets out your goals and aspirations for the future. If it is set in stone, it's not a plan, it's a commandment. That's not what you need. Plan but be prepared to flex, to adjust, accommodate, compromise and perhaps even to change direction, change the plan, even change the career path you originally chose.

Identify objectives

Entrepreneurs need to think in terms of short-term goals and objectives which lead towards your long-term career path planning. Your short-term goals will relate to longer-term objectives and overall career plan. Objectives need to be realistic and flexible in terms of delineating your career plan but be ambitious too; you won't climb high unless you aim high.

So, start by identifying the skills and experiences that will help you achieve your objectives. Take the time for some serious reflection and self-assessment. A career MOT, and plan to close any gap between where you are and where you want to be. Start with two key things:

What's important to you? Be honest with yourself and remember your sense of self has to do with what you want to become, not just what you are now.
What motivates you and what it is you enjoy doing and are good at? Ask yourself what are my strengths, my values? Where do I belong? What is my contribution?
Network for success

You need to ensure your network knows of your short- and longer-term objectives. Networking is crucial for career success and you need to make time to build and cultivate your network of contacts. This is not about job search but is really about market intelligence; use your network as your eyes and ears in the marketplace. Network with other founders and business owners. To do that, you need to add value as networking is about reciprocity, so look for ways to help people in your network.

As an entrepreneur, think about your personal brand strength. Do you have advocates within your company? Do people recommend you; are you known in the marketplace? Successful career planning is built on self-awareness, so think about your strengths as a key part of your personal brand.

Review your ongoing learning. Is there anything you would like to change or improve or add to your skillset? Acquiring experience and skills will add strength to your CV, while demonstrating your drive and enthusiasm and commitment to your career. Your network may be able to help you identify opportunities or put you in touch with people who can advise or help.

Plan to succeed

Taking charge of your career is an imperative, entrepreneurs need to market yourself as a product and campaign accordingly. You should see your career as a million-pound project and manage it accordingly. Effective career planning allows the mapping of a personalised career path enabled by contacts, peers, mentors, and colleagues.

A career plan based on your preferences, strengths and values ensures maximised performance and long-term goal alignment. If you are able do the things you love, then you are more likely to be happy at work, working to the best of your ability, and learning as you go.

In essence, you need clarity around what is important to you and ensure your personal values are aligned with your work and other commitments. Unless you happen to buy a winning lottery ticket, as an entrepreneur, you are going to be running your business and working at your career for the next few decades, so being a productive worker, effective performer and valued leader are important. Plan to make the most of your career.

Focus on career development

A recent piece by the Harvard Business Review looked at four common challenges that get in the way of personal growth. They categorize them as when, who, what, and where challenges. You need to think and act creatively to overcome these challenges and invest in your career development.

Change is inevitable

During lockdown many people re-evaluated what they want from work. The job for life is long gone and the traditional career ladder has been replaced by the career lattice – characterised by non-linear career moves where progression goes beyond promotion and allows people to develop in different directions.

Personal career development is an imperative rather than a nice-to-have. Don't allow the demands of the day-to-day to take precedence over growth, improvement, and investment in your future. Failure to spend time on personal development decreases career resilience and in the face of economic uncertainty is short-sighted.

Career development challenges

You may experience a combination of two, three, or even all these challenges at the same time.

Credit: Ketut Subiyanto

The "when" challenge: I'll concentrate on career development when I have time. The risk is that those day-to-day concerns never recede enough for you to find the time. Make the time for addressing some self-coaching questions on what you want to achieve.

The "who" challenge: I don't have anyone helping me develop my skills. The risk in feeling you are dependent on others for help is self-sabotage; you are responsible for your career. Do some networking and increase your support network, establish a group with the shared purpose to support each other in development.

The "what" challenge: I'm not sure what I want to develop. The risk is you will never make a start, if you don't plan for success, your likelihood of success decreases. Distinguish what you need to know from what's nice to know, as well as what's relevant to your current role and what might be relevant for future roles.

The "where" challenge: There are no career development opportunities in my workplace. The risk is you will lose motivation; you need to look for opportunities and make opportunities. Don't let circumstances hold back your development, look to unlock new possibilities. Identify an internal opportunity that you want to pursue and look for ways to achieve that outcome.

Aim for development and growth

Appreciating in value as an employee entails a proactive approach to career management and building networks to prepare for change and disruption.

Manage your career more effectively by paying attention to three key elements:

Knowing why: Understanding your motivation for working. Being clear on your values and what drives job satisfaction for you.
Knowing how: Being aware of the strengths, skills and knowledge you bring to your work and what you enjoy doing.

Knowing whom: Making your network aware of your career ambitions, investing in that network, and ensuring there is consistency between what you are trying to achieve and what people say about you when you're not in the room aka your personal brand.
About the author

Liz Sebag-Montefiore is a Director of 10Eighty, a strengths-based HR consultancy; and Executive and Career Coach. Voted #15 Most Influential U.K. HR Thinker 2022 by HR Magazine. For more information, please visit www.10Eighty.co.uk

LinkedIn – https://www.linkedin.com/in/lizsebag/

Facebook – https://www.facebook.com/10Eightyteam

Women in Tech – A Recipe for Success?

International Women's Day is a time to celebrate the achievements of women across the globe. It is a day to recognise the progress that has been made in achieving gender equality and acknowledge the work that still needs to be done. The day marks the contributions of women to society and brings to the fore the importance of striving for a future where women feel valued and empowered.

In order for women to feel motivated to succeed, it is crucial to foster an inclusive environment. Using these insights can help advance those working within the technology industry harness their creativity without feeling that equal opportunities are lacking. Women provide distinctive viewpoints, ideas and perspectives, and when taking into consideration the range of backgrounds and life experiences, it can lead to innovative solutions and product improvements that can offer immense value for businesses of all sizes.

As we celebrate International Women's Day 2023 it's crucial to identify, recognise and appreciate the progress that has been made in developing a more equal society, as well as paying close attention to the changes we still need to undertake. Regardless of the challenges faced, it is important to recognise the successes we are already seeing from female role models in technology-focused roles.

Redefining success for women

Success for women can mean different things depending on their experiences, backgrounds, and cultures. When asked about her journey, Rebecca Worsley, Founder & CEO of Shopify Plus agency Rainy City Agency states "as a female founder and leader in the tech space, I have realised that there is so much room for women to succeed in a predominantly male-led sector."

However, an area that has seen significant achievements for women in recent years has been an increased representation in positions of power. Women have and continue to break down barriers in fields such as politics and business, and in industries ranging from retail to manufacturing.

Georgina Goff, Senior Director of Marketing, Communications & Sustainability at global supply chain and manufacturing solutions provider Flex, agrees, stating that "the older ways of thinking provided a stereotypical view of a woman's role in society before new ideas and expectations became essential." Something that is especially prominent in industries such as manufacturing where archaic views regarding a woman's role are starting to be replaced by new and progressive opinions.

Challenges faced by women in the workplace

One of the key challenges which is facing many industries in modern day society can be attributed to an international major skills gap. On this topic, Goff raised the point of a recent Deloitte study with the Manufacturing Institute, which reveals there could be 2.1 million unfilled jobs in the US by 2030.

"Given that women are significantly under-represented in manufacturing at a mere 30% and with a continued focus on dispelling preconceptions and stereotyping, this could be the perfect opportunity for women to join the industry," she says, something that also resonates with Carmel Doyle, Operations Director, Europe & Asia, at Teamwork Commerce, who believes certain groups can often be overlooked.

Doyle says "A mother has many talents that can be beneficial in senior management positions, but sometimes I think they are overlooked as the focus is that they will need to take more holidays or work fewer hours. By changing the mindset and allowing working hours to be flexible, or implementing job sharing, the company can benefit from having a reliable, loyal and satisfied employee. Furthermore, they will appreciate flexi working time and will work harder and smarter to show their gratitude for the support, resulting in an engaged and productive employee."

Creating systemic change through mentoring

The definition of success has also changed, with it no longer being just about taking risks or achieving individual accomplishments. It is also about creating systemic change and empowering other women to succeed. This can be achieved through mentorship, networking and advocacy, and above all, working with organisations that have the same beliefs.

"Having worked on a number of exciting partnerships over the last year, we are proud to partner with retailers who are making strides in prioritising equality and equity in their ways of working," says Fenne Mahieu, Head of Success of Nedap Retail

"These include G-Star Raw, with the G-Star Raw Denim (GSRD) Foundation being awarded the 2022 Lotus Leadership Award for its contribution to women empowerment and gender equality in Asia. Superdry is focusing on an ongoing commitment to Diversity and Equality, and fashion retailer Bestseller is also working towards a goal of supporting 100,000 women in tier 1 factories by 2025 to bolster female empowerment within the organisation."

This comes back to the ideology that mentorship and role models play a key role in a more gender inclusive future. In May 2022, a report revealed that for women working in tech, role models are even more important, with 64% reporting being inspired by a role model to pursue their career, compared to only 47% of men.

Collaborative progress – a step in the right direction?

Success for women is not just about individual achievements, but also about collective progress. This means recognising the intersectionality of women's experiences and advocating for the rights of all women and ensuring they have the support needed to excel in their chosen careers.

Success today means creating inclusive spaces where all women can thrive, with discussions around the theme of 'female empowerment' starting to soar in mainstream popularity. "Female empowerment means we as women feel capable and able to grow and scale our passion beyond what we thought possible," explains Worsley. "Feeling embodied in making confident decisions and not questioning our ability to make them. It's understanding your own self-worth, supporting other women, and building your and their confidence."

"Women need the access to the same opportunities and resources as men, in order to be able to achieve the same level of success and rewards," adds Doyle. "Historically, women have had to struggle to gain equal levels of rights and respect to stand on the same podiums as men. The playing fields have not been level with women facing social disadvantages and a constant uphill battle to try to strive for equality in the corporate world."

Women in technology – the key to future prosperity?

International Women's Day also means celebrating the diversity and resilience of women across the world. Women are seen as the backbone of their families and communities, and their contributions to society are immeasurable. Women are leaders, caregivers, entrepreneurs, activists and creators. Their voices, experiences and stories are essential for creating a more just and equitable world.

Success on International Women's Day is about recognising the achievements of women, promoting gender equality and creating a future where all women can thrive. As we've seen here, it means breaking barriers, creating systemic change, advocating for others and celebrating diversity. Success, regardless of industry, should be recognised and celebrated, and it's exciting to see more women becoming the faces of these milestones in organisations all over the world.

Why businesses should value a mental health audit in 2023

A mental health audit can help a company better understand parts of its business that could remain hidden from view or present as future problems. The mental health requirements of employees continue to shift, so evaluating where the gaps exist now in terms of mental health training, diagnosis and treatment for conditions, and the use of data to measure the success of the workplace, can help leaders to prepare and make informed decisions about their workforce's requirements.

Every workplace is different. The needs and requirements shift and change over time. What works for one team may differ from others. Understanding how people have been affected by mental pressures, such as the cost-of-living crisis, can provide insights into the kind of support and resources missing from a business.

Even with highly involved management and executives, it is impossible to have a clear picture of everything happening with an organisation's employees. This is where a clinically led mental health audit is a cost-effective way of understanding workers' everyday lived experience and what mental health support is available on the ground. Business leaders can ask themselves: what actions can we take to make life and work more manageable?

What does it mean to incorporate a mental health audit?

Similar to the process of a Health and Safety audit, mental health audits look at various risk factors within an organisation that could negatively impact the mental wellbeing of staff. Using best practices, mental health consultants will explore areas of the organisation that could hinder an employee from effectively carrying out their job.

An audit measures a business's current practice against a defined standard. These standards form part of clinical governance, which aims to safeguard high-quality clinical care for all employees and those at senior levels.

With more businesses looking to reduce overheads and costs, an audit can help executives make more informed decisions on everything, from where to allocate resources, to predicting the likelihood of sickness, and maximising productivity and engagement in teams.

Mental health audits are not a way to capture or record evidence of a particular employee's mental health on an employer's behalf, or a criticism of employers, management, or individuals themselves.

What to do after a mental health audit

After carrying out the audit, a clinician or therapist can deliver a multitude of services to the business. This can be in the form of on-demand mental healthcare and even extend to bespoke mental health training in the workplace. Investing in mental health training is a good start to ensure that business leaders and managers are well-equipped to recognise and find a solution for the risk factors that could negatively impact the organisation.

With all that being said, an audit is an ideal way for companies to future-proof their business and adjust to the ever-changing climate of the workplace.

Tim Dunn, Chief Commercial Officer at Onebright

Image: Zachary DeBottisfrom Pexels

Advice for women entering the tech industry

Women have been pioneers in technology for nearly a century. From early innovators including Grace Hopper and Mary Allen Wilkes to modern-day visionaries such as Judith Faulkner, Susan Wojcicki and Padmasree Warrior, the contribution of women to the advancement of the technology industry is powerful.

While there are notable role models for women in tech, we know that the sector sits alongside other industries such as automotive and construction at the lower end of the scale when it comes to the percentages of women making up the workforce. The positive news is the participation of young girls and women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields has risen in recent years, and opportunities in technology companies big and small continue to grow.

Additionally, awareness is starting to increase - albeit more needs to be done on this front - about the varied nature of roles available to women who want to work in the tech industry. When thinking of working in technology, it's easy to associate the industry with positions such as engineering, software development and product management. However, there are many jobs within the sector that don't require candidates (female or male) to have specific engineering backgrounds or degrees.

For women that are exploring a career within the tech industry, or are early in their career, here are some of my top pieces of advice when it comes to succeeding and enjoying a fulfilling career.

Embrace being a 'stand-out'

Each human being is different, and we each have different talents and capabilities. It's not about stereotypes. It's about what you as an individual bring to the table. The important thing is to leverage YOUR strengths as best as you can! Are you a holistic thinker? Creative? Analytical? Logical? Great - lead with your strongest characteristics.

Early in my career, there were times where I felt self-conscious being the only woman, or one of a small number of women, working on a project or in a company meeting. Now I find it empowering. I've taken time to understand what I'm good at and enjoy, and what I'm not good at (and would rather avoid!).

With time, self-awareness and reflection, confidence can increase, and you can become comfortable knowing where you can make the biggest impact. The fact that your forte may be different to male colleagues, or any of your colleagues for that matter, is advantageous to know. Acknowledging how your capabilities can complement the strengths of other team members is really valuable to a company. I know that I bring a different perspective and I enjoy sharing it with colleagues – and it's engaging to learn from others!

Build relationships

My advice around relationship building is not about networking or mentoring, though there's benefits to doing both of those things. Getting to know the people you're working with and what makes them tick is an important part of a healthy work environment and your career development. Strike a balance between relationship building and the focus on just getting 'stuff' done. This might mean spending a few minutes before a meeting (or even during a meeting depending on the setting, context and who is involved), understanding the 'why' behind a colleagues' approach, or catching up over coffee on topics not directly related to work.

This approach is just as important when on Zoom, Teams or other video calls. Video calls are far superior to the ways of working even a decade ago! You can see people's facial reactions and body language and ask questions that may have gone unasked when relying solely on verbal discussions.

It sounds obvious, but connections within a company really do matter. In the short term, having positive relationships within your team, and between your team and other functions in your company, makes it easier to get things done. In the medium to longer term, you'll build a reputation as someone who achieves goals while also being a person others want to work with. In turn, your credibility will increase and more opportunities will open for you as people understand how you're contributing to the overall success of the business.

Keeping in touch with people who move on is also very important. I still rely on some of my colleagues from my first few years of working in corporations to be my sounding boards. They know me and can give real feedback, which is priceless.

Focus on being the best and success will follow

Tech companies are typically data-driven environments where good ideas - and making those ideas become reality - win the day. If you flourish in an environment where meritocracy matters, tech is a great place to build a career. Meritocracy means that progress is based on talent, ability, and results. There is a clear link between success and emphasising that you can choose your own path, work hard, and grow. This is a very powerful and important mindset.

Another characteristic to consider is the say/do ratio. Getting work done matters. But if no one knows what you are working on or understands how your work impacts the company's results, that's not useful. Consider what you're doing in your daily work and how you communicate progress to goals. Think about how much time you spend on each element – the work

versus communicating results – and get the ratio right. It's not wise to overemphasize your contribution, but if you are only executing and nobody outside of a small bubble knows, that's not the right balance either.

Plan - but not too much

Having a career game plan is a good idea. However, we shouldn't be so wed to it that it means missing an opportunity that doesn't fit the plan. One of things that changed my career substantially was an unexpected lateral move. My boss at the time had to more than nudge me to take it on. Even though I didn't clearly see the long-term benefit back then, it changed the trajectory of my career.

Choose wisely

The tech industry is comprised of some very large companies and a huge amount of small and medium sized companies. Large or small, public or privately held, do your research.

There are unicorns, there are other companies that won't be in business for much longer, and everything in between. There are no perfect organizations, so I'm not suggesting holding out for a company built in an ivory tower! At the same time, don't only rely on the 'feeling' you get from a certain company or become too fixated with a concept, product, vision, or leader. Complete a holistic review. Acknowledge the attributes that will lead to the company's success and understand its limitations before you jump in. Do your due diligence as if you were an investor. This way, you'll have a greater understanding of the company's path, where you can contribute, and what speed bumps may be ahead.

Jen Lucas, Chief People Officer at Tricentis

Jen is a seasoned human resources executive with over 20 years' experience leading teams across all HR functions. She specialises in leading large-scale growth and change, mergers and acquisitions, driving peak performance, talent acquisition, and total rewards.

https://www.tricentis.com
@Tricentis

Image: ThisIsEngineering from Pexels

How To Become A Successful Female CEO – 9 Key Ways

The modern CEO image has drastically evolved over recent years. No longer is the only kind of image we traditionally see as a CEO a grey haired male figure in a suit or equally an elbow-pushing strong female with shoulder pads. For female CEO's in particular, this has changed beyond recognition and we're seeing a new wave of female founders activate their desires and lead in an effortless feminine manner to create financial freedom, independence, and happiness that is rooted in putting family, health and self first.

As we see our personal and professional lives dramatically overlap, particularly by COVID19 and the increase in working from home – it's becoming increasingly important for a more holistic and aligned approach for female CEOs to succeed in life and business. This may include some or all of the following: Ownership, Desire, Wealth Mindset, Integrity, Belief, Feminine Power, Emotional Intelligence, Strategy, Self-Respect

Believing you can have it all as a female CEO takes a certain level of vision, strategy and commitment to working in a sustainable way that not only works in your business but also in your life. So we spoke to Ali & Em who are the Co-founders of The Limitless CEO, how can we become a limitless CEO for success in all areas of our life? Here are their tips.

1. Life Ownership and Radical Responsibility
If you want more from life, you have to make the bold moves to make it happen. Becoming a limitless CEO involves taking ownership of the past with pride and living life with intention, to take radical responsibility for creating your future and dreams.

2. Ignite your Desire
Are you experiencing pleasure in your pursuit to become a female CEO? You get to turn yourself on with the dreams that you dared not speak out loud, until now! Often we're not fully going all out after we want and apologising for our desires. Igniting your desire activates your own magnetism to attract more of what you want, and faster.

3. Magnetise Money and Wealth
You have the right to make large sums of money. Your innate ability to be an energetic match for money is undeniable but not everyone knows how to create wealth. You can stop being a 'money maker' and become a Wealth Creator to enjoy the full richness of life for your journey now and generations to come.

4. Integrity
Being a limitless female CEO involves being in integrity and showing up in business in your completeness, bringing the best of yourself and honouring your values no matter what. It means putting family, health and self first, so that when you deliver, you are in alignment with that which you wish to create into your world.

5. Trust & Belief
Learning to trust that it's all happening for you when you don't have the evidence yet is the real work of a leader. Continuing to make big, bold moves with the confidence that it will work is the inner work of a limitless female CEO. This can mean you need to upgrade in your beliefs about yourself to match what you're looking to create through your business.

6. Leading in Feminine Power
A CEO that can lead in feminine power is the one who can balance the masculine energy of doing and the feminine energy of being, regardless of gender. Blending the Strategy & Structure with Heart & Soul is the secret to becoming a powerful boss leading the show in an effortless flow.

7. Emotional Intelligence and Resilience
A limitless female CEO knows how to navigate the highs and lows of life and business while honouring emotions to remain in alignment and focus of the bigger goal and holding your integrity when other people push your buttons!

8. Strategy
Strategy holds everything together, allowing you to show up in your business fully expressed as the most powerful version of you and know you are supported by the right people and on the right path. Strategy is there to turn a business into a brand, capable of growing exponentially in impact, income & influence.

9. Self Respect

Self-respect for a limitless female CEO is holding standards of integrity in life and business, owning, and enforcing the boundaries that protect our energy and learning how to hold it all in order to have it all. Self-care is a really key part to this and in turn creates a limitless life so that you can give to others in abundance.

The Limitless CEO was launched in August 2021 by Ali & Em to bring a new paradigm to female leadership. Ali is the Mind Master and Energetics Creator, whereas Em is the Online Business Strategist and VIsionary. Together they support women through 2:1 coaching, masterminds, coaching programmes and free online content.

Between them they boast not only senior roles in the corporate world, have been Directors of several businesses, and also have relevant qualifications from the highly acclaimed Oxford College of Marketing, to the Institute of Integrative Nutrition.

Website: https://rise.forthelimitlessceo.com/

Photo by Andrea Piacquadio: https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-a-woman-holding-an-ipad-761993/

Top 8 Reasons To Hire a Freelancer

As the negative impact of staff shortages is felt across a myriad of UK industry sectors, freelancers can play a critical role for businesses. Freelancers were considered a last-minute stopgap that garnered the bare minimum of investment, there is now an increasing acceptance of the value freelancers bring. Due to a combination of changing perceptions on different forms of working and pandemic-driven resignations, businesses are more focussed on the quality of the work they can get, rather than treating it as a way to cut costs.

A recent survey by PeoplePerHour showed that 84% of businesses believe freelancers can make a positive difference to their business, with nearly half (45%) more focused on quality than cost when hiring. A fifth (20%) said they would pay whatever rate it takes to get the best person for the job. The research also found that London is the top city for businesses using freelancers, followed by Manchester and Birmingham.

You may have been thinking about taking on a freelancer for a while, or you might have a sudden emergency on your hands that needs dealing with right now. Either way, if this is the first time you've considered getting some freelance help, you'll find it's the ideal solution if you're:

Struggling to keep staffing costs down: When taking on another permanent employee would eat into your profits too much, a freelancer is the most economical solution.

Employee churn: Freelancers don't churn, they thrive on multi-tasking between clients while being proactive enough to own their project.

In need of a boost in your business: When you need more hands on deck but don't want to take on someone permanent until things settle down, a freelancer is an ideal alternative.

Stumped by staff losses: When one of your staff leaves and you need someone to take over their role in a hurry, a freelancer can fill that gap temporarily. A freelancer will also help you work out what you need as a long-term solution.

Shocked by surprise extra costs: When you set the budget for a job, the freelancer sticks to it.

Lacking expertise: When nobody in the office can do the task that needs to be done, it's easy to find a freelancer with the skills you require.

Weighed down by your workload: When you've got far too much on your plate already, a freelancer can help bring your workload down to a more realistic level.

Seasonal staffing issues: When you need coverage for employees' summer or winter holidays, who better to call on than a freelancer. No matter what your reason for using a freelancer is, the best benefit is that you'll always have peace of mind knowing that whatever problem comes up in your business, there's someone out there who can solve it for you.

Author: Xenios Thrasyvoulou, Founder and CEO of
https://www.peopleperhour.com

How to Strengthen Customer Loyalty

As scepticism towards advertising rises, consumers are increasingly turning to online reviews on platforms like Google, Meta (Facebook), Yelp, and TripAdvisor to find the products and services they need. Indeed, 84% of people trust online reviews as much as recommendations from friends, and 89% of consumers read reviews before making a purchase.

The influence reviews have on customer trust and loyalty should not be underestimated. In addition, reviews and ratings heavily influence search rankings, so ensuring they are optimised is imperative for online discovery.

Business owners generally understand the importance of online reviews, with more than 90% of SMEs concurring that online reviews are critical to their success. However, many businesses find managing online reviews daunting, as opening the door to positive customer reviews may also let in negative ones. Yet negative reviews bring their own opportunities for customer engagement and constructive feedback, not to mention a wealth of data that can provide ideas for innovation and improvement.

Strengthen brand reputation through responsiveness

As the old adage goes: reputation takes years to build and minutes to destroy. With the influence of social media, this has never been more true. This is something businesses must take into account when interacting with reviews online — especially negative ones.

It may seem easier to ignore negative or critical comments, but in doing so businesses will only further damage their reputations. Instead, they must look for a streamlined and productive way to handle this feedback.

The best way to build an online reputation, even in the face of negative reviews, is by getting local teams to be more proactive, and ensuring that communication across the whole business is timely and consistent. For businesses with a variety of locations — where negative reviews can come from a range of localised problems, such as understaffing or key products being out of stock — it's vital that local teams and management alike be aligned on how to approach negative reviews.One way to do this is to create and enforce a clear, easy-to-follow process and make certain that the tone and messaging of replies is in line with your brand identity and guidelines. Employees that know how to respond to negative reviews are invaluable to building a business's reputation and keeping customers on your side.

Improve search visibility and rankings

A healthy review score is crucial for establishing trust. Beyond that, a review star rating improvement of just .1 could create a 25% increase in store footfall. And having a well-established review management process will improve the chances of getting higher ratings.

You may already know that reviews are a major ranking factor in local search. Every time a potential customer searches using terms like 'best,' 'top,' 'great' and 'highest rated,' Google will generally show businesses with 4.0 ratings or higher first. So the better the review score the more likely the business is to be found online by 'near me' searchers. Review volume also matters in search rankings.

While responding to reviews isn't a ranking factor, Google encourages businesses to respond because it creates an engagement cycle that can translate to higher scores, which do impact rankings. It's important to reply to negative reviews within 24 hours and sometimes much more quickly, depending on the complaint or problem.

Leaving a negative review unanswered, where it is visible to potential customers, will damage retention and potentially bring down your overall star rating (depending on how many reviews you have). Some critical reviews are inevitable and, paradoxically, add credibility to your overall score so they shouldn't be feared. But the best practice is to respond to all reviews and negative reviews much more quickly.

Because review volume and recency matter, businesses should be proactive in encouraging customers to leave reviews across the major platforms. However, if you're in a category or geography where Yelp is important, you must pay close attention to its policy; Yelp discourages and will penalize review solicitation. Other platforms permit it and Google even enables it.

Analyse reviews to identify patterns

Hopefully, negative reviews are infrequent outliers. But when they occur, they can be valuable in improving the customer experience. For example, if customers are reporting repeated bad experiences at a particular branch, that should trigger an investigation together with mitigation – and of course reply to the review and explain how the issue is being addressed.

Noticing patterns of positive feedback is also useful for spotting potential avenues for growth. For example, are

customers regularly saying that one new aspect at a particular branch, like self-checkouts, should be replicated at other locations? Do they prefer different opening or closing hours? Are there suggestions of new products and services? Mine such comments for clues to future growth opportunities and insights to improve the customer experience.

Make online review management a priority

Effective review management requires consistent attention and a personal touch; and while the process can be time consuming, as your business grows larger it is entirely possible for multi-location brands to maintain the same responsiveness as the corner shop. Digital tools can enable local managers and their teams to engage with customers in real-time via a centralised platform, allowing personalised responses within brand guidelines.

The key for all SMEs is to put an effective review management system in place that both captures insight and enables maximum responsiveness – allowing businesses to reap the rewards of increased customer loyalty and trust.

Author: Tijs van Santen, Chief Customer Officer, Uberall

Tijs van Santen is Uberall's Chief Customer Officer. He brings an extensive history of building go-to-market teams for high performing tech and SaaS companies, including HP, Forrester Research, Impact and Button. Tijs is recognised as a customer-centric leader with a focus on always delivering value for the customer. https://uberall.com/

What Can An Advisory Board Do For Your Business?

At some point in your growth journey, you're going to need the sort of expert perspective that isn't frequently found in early stage or startup companies. Maybe your strategy is to rapidly expand into new markets, and you need help understanding the risk. Or you're faced with new and complex regulations. Maybe you simply need guidance on whether to consolidate or let go of a part of your business, or to evolve your products or solutions.

To solve these problems, and others like them, a growing number of startups have begun appointing 'advisory boards'. These are teams of, or individual, non-executive advisors who work on a part-time and advisory basis, often for a fixed term of anywhere between 12 and 36 months. Over the past few years, appointing advisory boards has gained momentum among the startup community. But in the wake of Covid-19 with many industries still facing years of uncertainty, this trend has accelerated.

Most board advisors come with the sort of battle scars your average business owner wants to avoid – experience in guiding organisations through economic crises and market crashes. But it's the lessons learned from previous global downturns that can be invaluable for businesses currently trying to cut a path through the fallout of the pandemic. How can you best navigate the disruption to global supply chains? Should you take advantage of new business opportunities or double down on existing relationships? Continue to invest raised funds or even profits in engineering and platform development or focus on sales and marketing? And which geographic markets are a safe bet, and which aren't? Having seasoned leaders to turn to for guidance and advice on these issues can be critical for setting a long-term path to profitability and sustainable growth.

They are also highly cost-effective. A full-time suite of non-executive board members is a serious financial investment and typically reserved for established medium to large-sized organisations who need extensive and ongoing governance. However, for advisory boards, there are various means of remuneration that don't need to break the bank. This includes both short-term fees or equity, making them an economical option for scale-ups that need to access heavy-weight leadership skills.

Return on Investment

When appointed to source funding opportunities, a board's return on investment is usually particularly noticeable. Having a background on the boards or executive committees of other, often larger companies, brings both an understanding of how to raise venture capital funds and access to a community of investors. A direct link to this network has huge value for start-ups looking for their first rounds of series funding.

What's more, as your company develops and matures, you'll probably want to expand into new geographies. Advisory boards can be appointed to bring region-specific experience; a knowledge of how to market products or services to foreign consumers, and an understanding of country-specific business practices, micro geo-political and cultural nuances. It's now not uncommon to see early-stage companies appoint advisory boards with a single advisor based in the UK, Europe, North America, and Asia respectively.

The most value, however, often comes in the form of diversity of thought and fresh perspectives. Board advisors bring a level of knowledge to a company that it wouldn't necessarily be able to gain (or afford) through a permanent executive appointment. For example, if you engaged a board advisor to help with product development, they could offer guidance on innovation pathways and R&D, or simply act as a sounding board for ideas.

Challenge of appointing the right advisor

Whilst this might all sound great, appointing the right advisors can be challenging. When utilised successfully, these individuals will engage with you and your leadership team and influence some of your most important decisions. A certain level of chemistry, 'fit', and passion for the business from an advisor is therefore paramount. Understanding a potential advisor's motivations will also help you discern who is, and who isn't right for your business.

Often, prospective board advisors will be motivated by the opportunity to work with a startup that has a unique proposition – your business might be solving complex problems, tackling social or environmental issues, or just have a really interesting product. Others may be motivated by joining a well-funded scale-up at a critical moment on its growth journey – the opportunity to help a good business grow is an attractive sell, especially for those with an investment background. Whilst others will consider an advisory position simply because the alternative (a formal non-executive role) is often laden with governance. In these circumstances, a vibrant culture, a visionary CEO with big ideas, or the opportunity to take the business into untested markets can be highly appealing.

Whatever the selling point is, finding the right advisor will mean having someone who is dedicated, provides meaningful input, and genuinely wants to see you and your business succeed.

Author: Mike Drew

Mike Drew, Partner and Head of the Global Technology & IT Services Practice, explains how early-stage companies can benefit from appointing an advisory board.
https://www.odgersberndtson.com/en-gb

Building An International Growth Strategy

Despite the growing importance of globalised business strategies and the potential to successfully expand abroad, there is a range of emerging challenges that can impact the ability of ambitious organisations to succeed on the international stage.

Take the increase in regulation around data protection and privacy, for example, or the current global semiconductor supply shortages. To a greater or lesser extent, these issues are influenced by the interests of governments who want to assert their local control over strategic technologies and governance.

As this 'technology sovereignty' becomes a greater priority for national governments and political/economic regions such as the EU, businesses are faced with the challenge of increasingly complex and heavily regulated trading environments.

Tech sovereignty is becoming more important for governments around the world. They see technology as an influencer and a solution to a lot of critical challenges, particularly sustainability and climate change. These interconnected issues mean businesses need to focus on regional and local differences more than ever when moving from national markets to international growth.

Identifying the priorities

As companies think about their global expansion plans, top of the list are going to be questions about where to focus and why one territory may offer advantages over another. For instance, a UK business looking to expand to the US should understand that, in practice, the US is often not one country but 50 states. Organisational leaders need to understand a range of diverse issues, including the jurisdictions, regulations, and the tax situation in each state – some of which is being influenced by their national focus on tech sovereignty.

Next, come questions about how the business will implement its expansion plans. Does it, for instance, have investors to fuel its growth? Businesses should also plan so they have an exit strategy in line with their growth plans. Startup and fast growth technology businesses often place themselves in a market ecosystem where being acquired by a bigger, established brand is their number one exit goal.

So, organisations working with this as a feature of their business model should evaluate whether what they are building, on an international scale, is relevant enough for a big tech company to acquire. Considerations can include where a company chooses to base itself, an organisation that feels it's building a proposition that is particularly relevant to Microsoft, for example, might choose Seattle as its US base.

There are many UK startups who have tried to enter the US market without a full understanding of the potential costs involved. As many will testify, getting established in Silicon Valley can be an extremely expensive investment, so it's vital to be aware of the risks as well as the potential rewards before making a decision and commitment. This includes assessing how their plans could be affected if they operate in a sensitive technical niche where sovereignty issues may come into play.

Be clear on culture

These considerations grow in complexity when a business is dealing with major cultural and language barriers. Expanding to China, for example, is a classic example of the huge learning curve an organisation faces when balancing the potential of that market against the totally unfamiliar business, regulatory, financial and cultural environment.

This is where working with an established and experienced local partner can have a transformational effect on the ability of a business to hit the ground running in an unfamiliar market. Working with local experts who can help navigate rules and regulations is vital, can help avoid both minor and serious pitfalls and significantly accelerate the ability of a business to grow quickly enough to meet its objectives. What's more, the availability of employer of record solutions such as the Globalization Partners global employment platform enables startups and fast growth companies to build their international presence by employing the best talent in the world and beating the competition to scale and to market.

Looking closer to home can also bring significant challenges where sound advice will be required. Post Brexit, the relationship of UK companies with the EU has become more complicated, but some important issues remain unchanged. Any business focused on the collection, management and use of personal data, for instance, must still ensure it is GDPR compliant if it has customers within the EU region.

However, in focusing on EU-wide rules and regulations, businesses dealing with specific countries in the region should balance this against the need to adapt to the huge business and cultural diversity across the 27 individual countries.

Understandably, businesses will prioritise the administrative tasks required to get a team up and running in a new country. What can often get left behind, however, is the importance of cultural norms that play a huge role in determining whether a new venture will be successful or not.

For example, the factors that build sales momentum at home will often be quite different from those required abroad. Similarly, when hiring staff to build a local team, there can

be significant cultural differences that will make the business more or less attractive to potential employees. Failing to take account of these local norms can be an inconvenience at best, and in the worst-case scenario, it can cause an international expansion strategy to fail.

This is why Global Tech Advocates aims to create an international community of tech leaders – so businesses can improve their understanding of different ecosystems around the world and access informal networks of local experts as they scale and expand globally.

As the world continues down a path towards highly connected, digitally transformed economies, the opportunities for global growth will accelerate. While the influence of tech sovereignty has the potential to complicate matters for businesses putting expansion plans into place, careful planning can help navigate the pitfalls to build successful international teams.

By Russ Shaw, Founder of Tech London Advocates and Global Tech Advocates, and Nick Adams, Vice President of EMEA at Globalization Partners. https://www.techlondonadvocates.org.uk https://www.globalization-partners.com

Research & Technology's Role in Driving Today's Business

In the last two articles of this series, we discussed the role of market research and tech innovation in business today, and we've deep dived into how the marriage of research and technology is shaping the market and helping businesses navigate and engage with their customers. With this under our belt, we want to now help our business leaders of today and the tomorrow understand how to use market research to positively impact sales and the bottom line as a whole.

Insight has tremendous power to create competitive advantages for small businesses today to help carve out their rightful place in the market. From product testing and sentiment tracking to customer feedback and purchase behaviour, we are well aware that 'knowledge is power' and of the strong benefits of data, especially for small businesses.

The onset of the global pandemic, and indeed everything in its wake including the economic impact, social and cultural movements, and political changes, has impacted every aspect of our lives. This applies both personally and professionally – from healthcare and education to work, relationships, and buying behaviours.

The changes we have experienced over the past few years are so significant that they have created moments in time like never before where people have been thrown off the daily treadmill and forced to reflect on what is important to them. Business is no different – the impact has been far reaching across companies of all sizes, and has forced their leaders to rethink the way in which they approach and engage with customers, internal and external stakeholders.

The questions business leaders must ask themselves today centre around these changes:

Are you armed with the right resources, tools, and technology to truly understand the impact of these changes on your customers?

Do you know how your business needs to adapt to reflect this?

Where do you start and how do you implement the right practices?

As people and environments change, technology is key to garnering human insights. Market research is designed to help keep pace with change, and when tech and research come together, they have the power to curate the deep human insight that today's businesses need more than ever before.

1. Create an Arsenal of Consumer Insights

As a business leader, you must be dialed into your customer. In fact, I would go as far as to say that understanding customer behaviour needs to become a passion for every successful business leader – the holy grail is getting to the point where you can anticipate and respond to your customers needs at every touchpoint and across the whole of the journey, no matter how much they may fluctuate.

Human sentiments are shifting rapidly in this post-pandemic era, and as such, the need for faster and more robust data and insights in line with tightened budgets and timelines are growing at breakneck speed. Successful business leaders are those that actively listen to and engage with their customers, to be able to adjust based on their changing needs. It is absolutely critical to continually take the pulse of customer sentiment to track sentiment analysis consistently.

Now that you have these insights, you can go a step further in reaching your customers, and ResTech offers a valuable opportunity to re-establish trust. Beyond just analysing your first-party data and customer insights, leverage this data to create authentic messaging that will resonate with your audience. Once you understand what's most important to your customers, you will be able to adjust your tactics accordingly.

Harnessing the power of first-party data – collecting, gathering and analysing the data you have to hand and coupling this with other market research insights can help you better understand shifting sentiments, buying patterns, and behaviours to help paint a better picture of the overall customer journey and what is of most importance to them throughout the process. What's more, tools and tech allow you to also accurately extract customer details to identify these shifts at the exact moment they're happening – these insights can be invaluable when used in line with your sales and marketing campaigns.

2. Prioritise Business Agility

If the last year has taught us anything, it's the importance of being able to pivot – even in those unusual circumstances of not knowing where you're pivoting to!

Agile processes have been tried and tested in the IT industry as a de facto standard for rapid roll out and response for particular systems and solutions that need quick implementation timelines. This scalable approach has been so successful that it is now adopted widely across many lines of business within many industries and sectors.

The role of technology within market research follows the role of agile IT practices, by enabling real-time insight gathering and an ability to collect and analyse data in shorter windows of time than ever before.

ResTech has the potential to not only carve out your changing customer personas, but to also help increase the efficiency of your business operations. Beyond pivoting with your customers' changing sentiments, an agile approach to research, data and analysis can also extend to inwards and can help improve employee satisfaction and retention.

In today's day and age where the health, wellbeing and inclusivity of your employees is business critical, this can have huge implications. Whilst customer engagement and purchase behaviour is important to business growth and revenue, so too is ensuring you do not lose sight of the sentiments of your employees too. Truly understanding the needs of your staff and stakeholders will drive internal efficiencies, enhance team management and morale, and ultimately have a massive impact on the bottom line. After all, happy workers are productive workers!

3. Measure to Prove Your Worth

To keep pace with regulatory changes such as the demise of the cookie, new data practices are finally beginning to put the customer first and with sentiment being transient and ever changing, marketers must take notice of how this can impact their business reputation and market position.

As data plays such a crucial role in providing a relevant customer experience, businesses stand to gain better insight from tapping into their own insights, which is more relevant and effective for measuring and building out comprehensive go to market campaigns. The key to making the most of your first-party data and insights lies in forging the right partnerships and building internal resources and in-house capabilities.

The ability to directly monitor and measure your campaign health is critical to understanding the full impact and performance of your marketing. Bringing the tools that enable you to use different methodologies in-house will help you get under the skin of the data and make decisions accordingly to obtain the full picture of your customer.

The right partner can offer transparent, real-time access and flexible options to help you manage this in-house in an easy, cost-effective and efficient way. For example, at Lucid, our customers can integrate our measurement technology directly into their own existing systems and dashboards.

As we set our sights on 2022, it is more important than ever that businesses do their due diligence if they are to succeed. The UK is expected to return to pre-pandemic growth levels by the middle of next year, and the small business market in particular will be crucial to this.

It has been estimated that small to medium sized enterprises accounted for more than half of the private sector turnover and private sector jobs in the UK in 2020. The global pandemic has raised many challenges, but equally presents a lot of opportunities for agile business leaders to approach the market in a new way where perhaps other businesses are less able.

As the global economic outlook unfolds into a new year, businesses will need to adapt their model, approach, and 'north star' vision to what is fundamental to their core in order to meet demands of the evolving here and now. The stakes will continue to be high against the backdrop of constant change. Now more than ever, business leaders will need to be agile and flexible, to tap into market perception and customer sentiment in order to keep pace and adapt to the moment of today's fluctuating world.

Author: Ben Hogg, Managing Director, International, Lucid

How Can Ecommerce Startups Grow Internationally?

Money, dedication, sleepless nights – maybe even some failure along the way. Starting an ecommerce store can be a daunting task, but nothing matches the feeling once you start to reap the rewards of all that hard work.

But in a world with everything at our fingertips, startups are limiting themselves from the outset if they're only thinking about their local market. There's a huge pool of potential customers in other geographies currently going untapped, with more than half of global consumers said they are ready to buy from the UK. So why just think local when you can go global?

Grow, grow, grow

It's only natural to think first about your closest customers first. Some of the most popular businesses started off small, catering to local consumers before becoming the ecommerce giants they are now. But once the home market starts to become saturated, it's probably time to start thinking about expanding internationally. International consumer markets are growing at a rapid pace, with businesses of all sizes and in all locations reaping the rewards of the current ecommerce 'boom'.

Yet many startups are still being forced to focus on products in their home market with the aim of first gaining momentum to navigate the traditional obstacles of early-stage businesses. The problem is, if a business focuses too much on just the local market without keeping one eye outside of the country, it likely won't be able to support itself in the long-term. After all, there are over 7.6 billion people in the world, and only 66 million in the UK.

Localisation and globalisation are closely linked

In an era of globalisation, startups are having to compete with or use the services of the likes of Amazon or eBay. But offering localised services and products could offer a significant competitive differentiator.

Businesses that offer localised products are able to utilise and promote deep market knowledge to attract new customers and increase brand awareness and loyalty. This also rings true in their communication and marketing, as the same taglines and headlines that proved popular within one market could be completely lost on another.

As a startup looking to scale internationally, you can't afford for messages to get lost in translation. But it's not just a matter of swapping languages. Scaling globally takes an understanding of other cultures and new audiences – and ultimately how to cater to their needs. When entering new markets, think about the language, design and cultural elements of the website to provide a relevant experience for your new customers.

Consumers need a personal touch

Just 14% of UK businesses currently sell internationally. So, if you're one of the 86% of businesses that aren't selling internationally yet, it's time to start thinking about it as there's a lot of opportunity to be had. Because, there are still a lot of barriers for growing internationally, the typical ones of cost, delivery times and language barriers are being removed, allowing online businesses to thrive across borders. Language is an important barrier, and probably the most obvious place to start for businesses entering new geographies.

According to a survey commissioned by Weglot, 61% of UK consumers said shopping on a foreign language website was a significant put-off, while 49% said they wouldn't buy a product online if the website wasn't in English. The key to expanding is producing a business which is able to personalise and localise their products to cater to specific geographies, but there are certain aspects to think about first in order to boost success.

Firstly, it's important to take it step by step. Rushing into opening several stores across the world takes time, resources and manpower, so you've got to be confident that you have these first if you're to meet consumer expectations. Start small by translating your store into one language first, as it's better to build up a solid base as you go along rather than trying to expand everywhere and anywhere at the same time. This actually leads me onto the next tip, because the first one would typically be the most popular language based on where your current web visitors are coming from, as it's clear there's a demand for your products. When selecting which new territory to open up in, make sure you check the location and amount of current website visitors. This will tell you where you already have a base of budding customers and give you a good platform to build further success.

Last, but by no means least, ensure you are constantly monitoring web traffic to check on performance, sales and what can be improved. Your website is your best sales tool, so make sure it's optimised, user friendly and a good representation of the brand. And be patient. Building success in brand new areas can take time, but if you utilise the right tools and put the customer first, you'll put yourself in the best possible place.

Unimaginable growth

Scaling a startup internationally doesn't have to be hard work. The difference between failure and success usually comes down to diligent planning, a global frame of mind and keeping everything customer-centric. This doesn't mean launching a business in multiple countries at once, but rather a focus on identifying what it is about the business that appeals to global audiences first and building on success one step at a time.

International expansion takes a lot of patience, but with the right plan and strategy behind you, each and every new market can make your business a global success.

Author: Augustin Prot, CEO and co-founder of Weglot, https://weglot.com

Grocery Shopping
ASDA
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Waitrose

From Bootstrap to Acquisition And Everything in Between

The journey of an entrepreneur is a long and complex one. It has ups and downs, extreme highs and extreme lows and hopefully you have more of the former than the latter, but it is tough, really tough.

Because I have had some modest success in my career (having IPO'd and sold tech companies) I am occasionally asked what makes me successful at growing a business. I tend to have two stock answers, the first related to personality, the second, rather less interestingly, related to evidence.

So firstly, the personality one. The odds of growing a company up to and beyond an 8-figure revenue are hideously improbable. In fact, it is vanishingly unlikely. Take 100 embryonic companies in tech with what the founders think is a cracking idea and less than 1 of them (a lot less than 1) will get that big. In fact, when any young, enthusiastic, budding business sort asks me if I think it is a good idea for them to follow this path I always shout 'NO!'. The thing is, the personality traits that makes you more likely to win are also the traits that can make you very difficult to live with, and I think there are three. The first is relentlessness – the ability to keep going when all around you suggests you will not succeed... you just keep going. 'The money's running out', 'the deadline is impossible', 'the team are revolting'... 'Pah' I say, just keep going.

The second is positivity – this one is the hardest one of all. Culturally, the British tend to avoid being positive from birth, it really isn't in our DNA. We are the plucky losers, we are the sardonic sorts charging at the cannons in a futile attempt to win, with the certain expectation to not. However, positivity is a virus. Display relentless positivity (see what I did there?) and others feed off that and the unlikely becomes probable. And the final one, which leads into the second stock answer is evidence. Most businesses fail because the founders have such a passion for their idea that they refuse any negativity towards their 'precious'. 'My widget is the best', 'my algorithm is smarter than yours', 'my plan is the plan that beats all plans'. Well, no it isn't. Why? Well, because there are around 8 billion of us on planet Earth, each born with a brain and each will have some good ideas in their often, quite long life. Your idea will not be unique. It really won't. Almost certainly someone, somewhere, will have thought about it as well.

So that leads on to the evidence found in data. The trick with business is to never trust instinct. Instinct is a cruel mistress, and it will guide you towards the cliff edge. We live in a world where data is everywhere and proof is a click away – and if not proof, then at least you can dispel your 'I wonder if' with a simple cheap survey of a 1000 people to see if you are on the right side of right.

So it is those three things that made ContactEngine so successful. We didn't start with Proactive Conversational AI, oh no, we started with live streaming telephone calls from any phone, anywhere in the world, live to the web. But the data told us we were wrong. So we changed. We started to help companies communicate better with their mobile workforce, proactively. But the data told us we were wrong. So we changed. We realised (guess what? Yup, the data told us) that it was communication to customers that really mattered – that was where the gold was – using all channels to start conversations with customers to solve moments of inefficiency, and my goodness there are lots of those.

Then came the really difficult bit. Persuading a reactive world of comms (where the customer was expected to come to you with their problems to solve) that their own data held the triggers to turn this around and be proactive – reaching out to the customer with communication that let them know what was happening, good and bad, and let them know that you cared.

That took us years, and in the last couple of years we won that argument and became the world's leading proactive comms engine, working with some of the largest brands out there.

But the story does not end there. The ups and downs in business meant that proving you are the best in the world at something – where frankly numerous massive software vendors should really have wised up to this years ago, is not an ideal place to be. Think David and Goliath – but where David left his sling shot behind. Not ideal.

So last week it was announced that ContactEngine were acquired by a company called NICE, a company I've known and admired for some time. They are data-driven, committed to perfection in customer experience, they are cloud and they are entrepreneurial. They also give us the ability to accelerate rapidly and to really take advantage of our first mover position. What's more, their relentless positivity shines though.

Now the journey continues. It's the same team – only with more resources being added by the day – to allow us to continue our plans for world domination in a lovely pro-active conversational kind of way.

About ContactEngine

ContactEngine is a Conversational AI technology that enables brands to proactively engage customers in conversations that fulfil business objectives. https://www.contactengine.com

What does it take to be a sustainable business?

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced consumers to adopt new habits, with a PwC report suggesting these are set to become permanent, representing a 'historic and dramatic shift in consumer behaviour'. The report concluded that consumers had evolved to be more digital and eco-friendly, while also reporting they had become more price-conscious, healthy, and data aware. Following on from COP26 and in light of the latest IPCC report declaring the climate emergency as a 'code red situation for humanity', it has never been so vital for businesses to focus on their sustainability strategy.

The distribution, packaging, and returns of online goods is a major contributor to carbon emissions – it's therefore of paramount importance to make this process more sustainable. Consumers are increasingly looking for steps to actively reduce their carbon footprint, and businesses need to adapt and promote sustainable practices to align with these customer values. Climate change and sustainability have now become an unavoidable topic and many consumers are ready to make the changes necessary to reduce their emissions and overall environmental impact. Sadly, too few companies are giving them that option at this moment in time.

The failure to uphold promises on sustainability
Research conducted by parcelLab analysed the performance of the UK's top 50 Direct to Consumer (DTC) brands and analysed their offerings on sustainability. The findings showed a comprehensive failure to offer customers choice in reducing their negative impact on the environment. This is surprising, as according to a recent IBM report, nearly 6 in 10 consumers said they were willing to change their shopping habits to reduce their environmental impact.

The DTC report revealed that just 4% of retailers offered a carbon neutral delivery option, and only 6% offered an option for the customer to request less packaging at checkout. On top of this, 30% of retailers still include plastic packaging in the parcel, and 52% included a branded insert. Furthermore, the findings revealed that not one of the retailers offered any form of sustainability messaging in their communications. Despite many retailers claiming to be making efforts to become carbon neutral, the reality is that during the delivery process DTC brands are generally falling well short.

Empowering the customer through choice
Our research highlights one simple conclusion: DTC brands are not providing their customers with eco-friendly solutions and offsetting alternatives at the checkout.

The fact that 94% of brands did not offer the customer a choice to use less packaging is an area where clearly there needs to be improvement. Businesses could also offer the customer a choice whether to use branded or recycled packaging, while also having the option to not include any single-use plastic within the package. Additionally, while many carriers now offer carbon neutral delivery options this choice is not being given to the customer during checkout. Businesses could go further and add an option for the customer to offset the carbon footprint of the entire order, with the potential to reward customers who make this choice with loyalty schemes or discounts.

Businesses have a responsibility to offer more sustainable options to their customers, but also to educate them on the simple steps that can be taken to reduce environmental impact. For instance, if businesses were to highlight the carbon footprint of an individual order at the checkout, and offer some alternative offsetting measures consumers can invest in, this would demonstrate a genuine effort to reduce their environmental impact. This is not necessarily about forcing each and every customer to take drastic steps, though of course some will. It is about empowering every customer to make choices which align with their environmental concerns, as opposed to leaving them with little to no choice on the matter as is the case across the majority of e-commerce platforms.

Educating the consumer through effective delivery communications:
Information also plays a central role in reducing the environmental damage of eCommerce. It can come in simple steps such as signalling to the customer what can and cannot be recycled either through instructions on the package or through delivery communications. Marketing material could also be included within delivery communications, eliminating the need to produce branded inserts in the package which are so often disposed of immediately. Accurate and immediate communication with the customer also maximises the chances of a successful first delivery attempt, resulting in carriers having to make less repeated and wasteful journeys along with happier customers.

The returns process is also an exercise often fraught with pain whilst being a large contributor to emissions – approximately 30% of all online retail sales are returned with 'serial returners' overordering only to return the vast majority of the order. This huge volume of returns is highly damaging to the environment and extremely wasteful, and with only 45% of brands offering paperless returns more should be done to make this process as environmentally friendly as possible. Brands should consider carrying the focus on sustainability throughout the return and refund experience; continuing to educate the customer on the environmental effects involved in returning the package.

Combatting 'greenwashing':
Finally, greenwashing is an accusation often thrown at fashion and retail giaants, and it is often not unfounded. It refers to attempts by businesses to make people believe thata a company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is. With the Chancellor recently announcing that UK firms will have to begin to disclose their environmental impact in order to combat greenwashing, it is vital that businesses become more transparent and honest about

their sustainability plans rather than creating misleading information. This will help to embed trust in consumers and encourage them to take seriously the environmental initiatives provided by businesses.

The DTC report highlights the plain fact that online retailers need to change if they are to become more sustainable. While it is unrealistic to assume this change will happen overnight, implementing a sustainability strategy should be of the highest priority for businesses. Businesses that do prioritise this are more likely to be successful as customers increasingly search for eco-friendly retailers to shop with.

By Dora Birna, Vice President Global Marketing & Growth at parcelLab

https://parcellab.com

What is CRM software and why might you need it?

Today, computers are involved in the running of almost every type of organisation, and any business owner that does not embrace appropriate Information Technology (IT) is likely to be at a disadvantage. The problem for businesses whose products or services are not technical, is to what extent is it necessary to computerise so as to maintain a competitive edge?

There are literally hundreds of tasks that are often better and more cheaply performed by a computer than a human – accounting, stock control, project management, marketing, diary management – the list is endless. So it's easy to burn up lots of time deciding what software you need, what is available, and what is actually any good. And if you are not particularly geeky, once you have made your choice, it's even easier to spend more time in front of the computer screen pulling your hair out than you do running your business start-up and talking to your staff and customers.

Generic or specific?
Software ranges from the very general, to the very specific. A general software package such as Microsoft Word can be used in almost any business, whereas a 3-D design package is much more specific – it would unlikely be of much use to an accountant.

But the more specific you become, the less choice you have, and the more expensive the products become. So generalised software is always the best place to start – at least until you are really sure of your requirements. Even general purpose software such as word processing and spreadsheets can be tailored to specific needs.

What is a CRM?
One type of generic requirement is for Customer Relationship Management or CRM, although the "C" bit is misleadingly specific. "Contact" would be a better use of the letter "C", since most businesses need to manage their relationship with more than just customers – suppliers, local authorities and government, to name just three.

At heart, a CRM is just a digital address book. What is the point of digitising an address book you might ask? Well, if you only need a handful of contacts to run your business, then probably "not a lot". But as soon as you get into even just tens of contacts, then things are different. And with more than one employee, they get significantly different.

Benefits
A digital address book (as opposed to a physical version) provides the following benefits..

You can share the address book with other staff
You can access it from anywhere
You can access it any time
Despite the above, there is only ever one copy – if you change contact details it changes for everyone simultaneously
You can add arbitrary items of metadata to each contact record. – for example, date of birth, last order, etc – and these items do not have to be decided at the outset.
You can process many contacts at one time

As well as the obvious time-saving benefit of avoiding two staff using different contact addresses, the impression outside contacts get of the company is so much better when their details are correct and instantly available.

Benefits one to five are enough for most business founders to justify the use of some form of CRM. However, it is benefit six – the ability to process records – that can provide the greatest returns on investment. Processing can be anything from sending a customised email to all contacts in a particular category, to analysing trends or statistics across any cross-section of contacts. For example, how many contacts under 30 buy yellow products?

A CRM is implemented using a database, which is basically an electronic form of a card-index file, except that it allows the creation of as many indexes as necessary, and searching takes fractions of a second.

It is easy to turn a generic CRM system into something specific to a particular business – and therefore potentially more useful to a budding entrepreneur – but it is worth exploring the features of CRM systems that can be applied to all businesses.

We have likened the main aspect of a CRM system to an address book. We need address books because we need to communicate with contacts and tracking communications is a key role for any CRM.

Today, our communications define our businesses. They can be emails, letters, phone calls, text messages, social media messages, invoices, documents, and so on. All of these are conveyed by electronic media. It is true that some communications are face to face, but these represent a relatively small proportion, and particularly since Covid.

These communications have to be addressed (ie who is it to and where are they?) and not only can the CRM be the primary source of these addresses, it can record the communications too.

Efficiency
Some CRM systems are targeted at particular horizontal applications such as sales tracking which apply to any company that sells goods. These systems provide supplementary functions to help manage particular processes that are connected to individual contacts. They often perform the

1
2
3
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400
500
INCOME
MONEY
IDEA

tasks which humans do not execute consistently or reliably. For example, a super salesperson is of limited use if he/she forgets to follow up a lead or spends too much time on the customers with the worst purchase track record. The CRM can do the scheduling for him/her and therefore use the salesperson's time far more productively.

Nevertheless, when the salesperson comes to follow up a lead, the job is so much easier and likely to succeed if the salesperson has all the relevant communications to hand. Email folders are not much use if they only contain the salesperson's messages because there may be several colleagues that have been involved with the contact – or even provided a quotation. Equally helpful is detail about phone calls exchanged with the contact, preferably with the ability to listen the call, but ideally with a searchable transcription. None of this is science fiction. All can be done in CRM systems with current technology.

Local or cloud-based

One last point is that many applications, not the least of which are CRM systems, are moving from the desktop to the Cloud. This means that instead of running dedicated applications on the computer in your home or office or smart phone at your fingertips, they are instead running on remote computers – you will know not where – connected to you via the internet. Your workstation then becomes a glorified terminal.

There are some disadvantages to this – such as if you lose Internet connectivity – but overall, the advantages strongly outweigh them. For one thing, you can run the same (CRM) application from anywhere, on any computer at any time. Secondly, your data is effectively safe from any physical disasters and thirdly, you don't have to install a new version whenever one is released.

So, to summarise,

CRM stands for Customer Relationship Management. In practice, CRM systems are applicable to any outside contact, not just customers.

CRM systems are basically intelligent address books (sometimes very intelligent). Although they are general purpose, they can often be tailored to fit a specific business.

CRM systems benefits include sharing data without having multiple copies (which can potentially get out of sync) and being accessible by any authorised user, anywhere.

CRM systems provide the ability to add arbitrary amounts of data specific to a particular business

Most significantly, CRM systems provide the ability to process lots of data automatically

For CRM systems to provide best value for money, they should be able to ingest communications (emails, phone calls, etc) because communications define a business.

The advantages of Cloud-based applications generally far outweigh the advantages of on-premise solutions.

Any entrepreneurial business employing more than one person should consider using a CRM, and they will usually find the investment in the system will be well worth the efficiency and time savings it provides.

Author: Dr John Yardley, Managing Director, JPY Limited and Threads Software Ltd

John began his career as a researcher in computer science and electronic engineering with the National Physical Laboratory (NPL), where he undertook a PhD in speech recognition.   In early 2019, John founded Threads Software Ltd as a spin off from his company JPY Ltd to commercialise and exploit the Threads Intelligent Message Hub, developed originally by JPY Ltd. Today, JPY represents manufacturers of over 30 software products, distributed through a channel of 100 specialist resellers. John brings a depth of understanding of a wide range of the technologies that underpin the software industry.   John has a PhD in Electrical Engineering from the University of Essex and a BSc in Computer Science from City University, London.

Web: https://threads.cloud

Why Is Upskilling More Critical Now than Ever?

Up until a few years ago, obtaining your undergraduate degree was a pass to the vast world of employment. Unfortunately, a higher education certificate might not take you that far nowadays.

Upskilling – the evolution of a person's abilities and career path – has become a buzzword in today's job ambience. Both employees and employers have begun looking at ways to maximise the available opportunities and minimise skills gaps. The world of work is changing at the speed of light, and you need to be able to adapt to it, otherwise you'll fall behind. Here is how to stay on top of your game at all times with upskilling.

Why should upskilling enter your vocabulary now?

Upskilling has been known to humanity for a long time, and it's become integral to our upbringing. But just like the world of work has changed, especially after/amidst the pandemic. The necessity of upskilling has changed too. While the half-life of professional skills was once 10-15 years, it's now been shortened to five years. For technical skills, this can be even shorter. This means that workers must constantly update their skills to stay relevant.

According to the ILO Global Commission of the Future of Work, "today's skills won't match the jobs of tomorrow, and newly acquired skills may quickly become obsolete." Things like technological advancements, climate change, globalisation, and COVID-19 are dictating changes in the workplace and the need for upskilling.

Automation calls for new technical skills

The question of robots replacing humans in the workplace has been pressing for a long time. The 2013 movie Her narrated the possible future of humanity where robots have replaced not only human labour but also human romance. It seems that the line between sci-fi and reality is becoming more and more blurred. According to experts at Fortune magazine, "40% of the world's jobs will be replaced by robots capable of automating tasks".

Yes, around 1.5 million jobs in England are at risk of being automated in the future, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This means that human labour won't be needed. Such jobs include elementary occupations, as well as process, plant, and machine operatives. As worrying as this sounds, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Although automation and digitalisation may replace low-skilled and manual jobs, they will create new job opportunities too. The areas that will see the most growth will be within the cognitive and metacognitive categories. We must adapt to technological innovations and this calls for continuous learning. Digital literacy, numeracy, creativity, and innovative thinking must improve continuously to keep up.

Globalisation, Brexit, and COVID-19: how are jobs shifting shape?

It's fair to say that most job sectors are shifting and so is the workforce demand. Globalised businesses are making way for both high-skilled and low-skilled jobs. However, medium-skilled jobs are being left behind. The job polarisation is due to the increased labour-intensive production, liberalisation of trade, and international transportation and communication. Workplaces within leading economies are looking for highly skilled people who are ready to operate on a global level. Conversely, they are also looking for cheaper low-skilled labourers.

However, both Brexit and COVID-19 have had an immense impact on disruptions to supply chains and trade. The UK is facing a workforce shortage, and Brexit has only worsened the situation. Those who thrive in this changing socio-economic environment will have transferable skills. These skills can be adapted and applied to different occupations and skills.

You might be wondering, is my job at stake? While many businesses are set to recover from Brexit and the pandemic, others might remain in the shadows. That's why it's more critical now than ever to upgrade your core skills. It's also important to upgrade your more alternative skills that are useful as a backup plan. For example, you can learn to become a ski instructor, a reiki healer, or an English language teacher. Obtaining such qualifications will make you an even more desired candidate. They will show employers that you are willing to adapt to new environments and learn new skills.

New jobs to drive the green economy forward

With the increasing focus on sustainability, employers are looking at ways to transition to a green economy. The International Labour Organization (ILO) advises that 24 million new jobs will be created worldwide by 2030. All this is in response to the growing green economy.

Employers are receiving support from governments to fund their sustainable recruitment initiatives. In the UK, the Sustainable Innovation Fund has been introduced to help innovative firms commercialise their ideas while contributing to national and global sustainability objectives. Such new careers include energy auditors, energy engineers, agroforesters, and air quality forecasters. These roles call for a whole new set of skills and abilities. Thankfully, there are a number of programs and courses designed to support sustainable development.

Apart from the emergence of new jobs within the eco sector, existing jobs are also being affected by the transition to a green economy. Upskilling is always essential. Such 'green' skills include eco-awareness, waste prevention, and efficiency improvement alongside core interpersonal skills in the likes of digital literacy, strategic and innovative thinking, and leadership.

The world is changing faster than ever with a lot of socio-economic factors at play. In order to adapt to the new world of work, employees are being urged to upskill their abilities and implement innovative thinking. In turn, this will drive both the economy and their personal development forward.

Personality vs Profit: You Can Have Both When You Recruit Right

Businesses have never recruited as much as they do today. They spend more time doing it and invest more money to get it done. But why do so many businesses get it wrong? What is the true cost of their mistakes? And is the increased emphasis on personality conceding ground to competence?

David Bernard, CEO of the innovative recruitment technology firm AssessFirst, believes that businesses can improve both their profits and personality-led cultures by modernising the recruitment process.

The traditional hiring process follows a pattern that most of us are familiar with and have experienced. It goes something like this: HR determines what the tasks of the vacancy are with hiring managers and outline the attributes required to fill it. Job adverts are posted and applicants apply. An interview is arranged. The winning candidate is offered the job.

That process has undergone some change over the years, but the essential structure has remained the same. The problem with this model is that we don't know how successful it is. Most companies can tell you how much they spend in pursuit of the ideal candidate. But far too few of them can explain the true cost per hire.

What we do know is that the traditional recruitment process is broken. I often put my head in my hands when I read the myriad of HR reports that reveal the prevalence of bad hiring. The 2020 Career Builder report offered little reassurance. It stated that 74% of employers hired the wrong person last year. This came at an average cost of £10,843. This is madness.

Profit

Productivity ought to be a key consideration when seeking a new candidate. Ideally, the new hire should be more productive – either through skillset, efficiency or both – so that profit opportunities can be maximised. This makes a bad hire doubly costly. Not only are businesses paying for a wasted recruitment process with inefficient training and slowed productivity, but the cost of missing a chance to improve the quality and volume of output is equally detrimental in the medium-term. Profits that could have increased, instead suffer.

Research by McKinsey & Company suggests that the top 5% of talent is 8 times more productive than average talent. Of course, every employer should aim to be recruiting from as near to that top 5% as possible. Now you might, if you are an employer or recruiter, dismiss this as impossible – 'that's ok for the Google's and Apple's of this world, but how can I find that top 5%?' This doesn't have to be an impossible aspiration. There are solutions that I will come to shortly, but first let's breakdown just how a bad hire can damage profitability.

The $200,000/$50,000 formula demonstrated by HR Daily is a fantastic illustration of the problem. It outlines how an employee who brings in $200,000 in revenue would make their employer a profit margin of $80,000 on the hire. But an employee from the top 25% of the talent pool would give the business a profit margin of $130,000 because they will bring in more revenue. A bad hire therefore results in a $50,000 loss of profit.

Personality

"The first thing we look for when hiring new staff is personality. In my eyes, personality always wins over book smarts." – Sir Richard Branson

It is a statement that divides recruiters, business owners and HR professionals.

Whilst the declaration that personality wins over 'book smarts' is contentious, it is inarguable that character is a vital and too-often overlooked requirement for any given job role.

Finding candidates that match the core values and culture of a company is a profitable exercise, increasing the likelihood that good candidates can be retained. It also provides the opportunity to diversify your pool of talent, bringing in people who think differently to other staff to challenge norms and existing processes.

Deciding between two or more candidates who appear to offer similar advantages is hard; the choice can be simplified with in-depth personality data. Personality is in fact a predictor of future job performance that exceeds the quality of information that you can obtain from analysing a person's CV or qualifications.

Comprehensive personality assessments increase the chance of hiring the best people. And the best people drive healthy profitability.

Personality metrics

At AssessFirst, our AI recruitment platform collects hundreds of data points about a candidate without the candidate having to complete long drawn-out questionnaires. This gives employers two crucial advantages in the hiring process; it provides a breakdown of a candidate's personality type. And

it helps to predict each candidate's behaviour, revealing the tasks, projects and even teams where they will have the most impact.

Gathering objective personality data provides insight that can help to eradicate unconscious biases. All employers are susceptible to, for example, confirmation or affinity bias during the recruitment process. This bias, perhaps more than any other factor, contributes to bad hires.

Those continuing to recruit without the benefits afforded by Artificial Intelligence are prone to being in the 74% of employers that make the wrong hire. Data driven personality recruitment goes well beyond a simple tick-box personality test. It is a deep analytical tool that draws from behavioural science: assessing cognitive and non-cognitive patterns. This is how employers can tap into the top 5% of talent specific to their company and culture.

The recruitment model of 'advert, application, interview' is as antiquated a process as there is in business. AI powered recruitment is more frequently associated with blue chip tech companies, but I think that a much larger cross section of the business community, many of whom are challenged by the uncertain post-pandemic market, cannot afford to get recruitment wrong. And it is personality metrics that will help to ensure they get it right.

6 Tips for Restructuring Your Business Post-Covid

Unprecedented changes have been inflicted upon most of the nation's businesses, following the devastation of COVID-19. That being said, there are those industries – such as healthcare, online entertainment, digital marketing and eCommerce – that have thrived on the changes brought about by the pandemic. On the other hand, other fields, like retail and hospitality, have suffered greatly due to lockdown orders and social distancing rules. Whether your business has flourished or declined, however, post-pandemic restructuring may be essential. No matter what trials and tribulations a business has faced, this crisis should now be seen as an opportunity to learn, in order to be better prepared for the future.

Darren Diamond, associate of the business restructuring specialists, Lawton Benjamin, has a great deal of professional insight into the various steps one can take to ensure their business is able to prosper in the wake of the pandemic. Here, Darren has detailed six tips that a wide selection of businesses will need to implement.

Allow for Remote Working

Remote working is a phrase many will have never heard before 2020, but since then, it's been ingrained in our day to day lives to the extreme. In order to survive the lockdowns, as they continuously reared their ugly heads, the UK's businesses had no choice but to ask their staff to work from home. Before long, this was referred to by many as the 'new normal', and it's only relatively recently that the nation's employees have been able to return to the office. Whilst there are those who are overjoyed with this return to normalcy, others have done so begrudgingly, with yet more workers being provided with the option to continue to work remotely, should they choose to.

The businesses offering the latter have got it right. There are undeniable benefits to allowing staff to work from home, in both employee motivation and cost savings. Whilst some people really struggled to separate their home and work life, others thrived, and to suddenly take this away from them just doesn't make good business sense. Looking ahead, it would seem that restructuring companies are more than likely to continue to accommodate those working from home, in order to reap the benefits of this flexibility.

Get Online!

Similar to the push towards remote working, the pandemic also gave many businesses the shove towards an online presence that they desperately needed. Whilst there's nothing wrong with the traditional, face-to-face experience, it's important to understand that the Internet isn't going anywhere and businesses will need to evolve if they want to succeed. This is the case regardless of the pandemic, but COVID-19 has certainly forced many businesses to start providing their customers with an online service, which can be accessed from the safety of their homes.

Whether this applies to retail stores launching their own courier services, family restaurants providing online food delivery, or anything in between, it's a simple fact that the need for businesses to get online grows more and more each passing day. The pandemic has helped to nudge reluctant businesses in the right direction, and when it comes to successfully restructuring in the wake of COVID-19, investing more time and money into your online presence is certainly advisable.

Save on Costs

The pandemic has seen the revenue and profits of countless companies plummet, consequently making money saving and cutting costs a priority for many restructuring businesses. When it comes to cutting costs, the end goal is always to be able to continue working as efficiently as normal (if not more so), but at a lower rate. When reassessing your expenses, have a shop around for cheaper insurance policies or software subscriptions, that won't have a negative impact on your business or employees if implemented. Comparison sites can be a useful tool in this endeavour, as they allow you to input your business details and compare multiple offers.

Utilise Government Support

The Government has helped many businesses stay afloat throughout the various lockdowns, by offering support through a series of grants and loans, as well as a furlough scheme; the latter enabling companies to continue to pay employees, when forced to close premises or downsize, without going out of pocket themselves. Researching the various Government support schemes available to you should certainly feature as an element of your business restructure. Remember, these support options exist solely for struggling and recovering businesses to take advantage of!

Improve Your Customer Engagement

Customer engagement has played a crucial role in the survival of many businesses throughout the pandemic, with many brands finding a new appreciation for just how important this is. COVID-19 or not, any business that struggles to offer the same services as a competitor may be able to lock down

(no pun intended) a client through customer experience alone. It's become increasingly apparent that human-centric, empathetic customer engagement, which prioritises the value of the customer over the sale, is needed now more than ever. Customers who feel a genuine connection with a brand are far more likely to stay loyal to them, regardless of whatever worldwide crisis is around the corner.

Stay Up to Date With Your Competitors

Many companies will be coming out the other side of this pandemic with fewer competitors than they started with. On the other side of the coin, however, businesses in the previously mentioned pandemic-thriving industries may need to develop more competitive strategies in order to cope with the growing demand for their services, not to mention the new competitors that might have come out of the woodwork as a result. Regardless of which side of the coin your business is on, it would certainly be wise to stay up to date with what your competitors are doing, in order to understand exactly how the impact of the crisis has affected where you stand in the market.

The pandemic has wrought significant changes in the way that businesses are run, so,

regardless of whether a company has suffered or thrived as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, business restructuring is likely to be a mutual necessity.

Darren Diamond is an associate of the business restructuring and tax specialists, Lawton Benjamin. He is an experienced director with a demonstrated history of working in the accounting industry. Darren has strong professional skills in business planning, accounting, income tax, tax, and account management.

https://www.linkedin.com/company/lawton-benjamin/

https://www.instagram.com/lblawtonbenjamin/

Top tips to drive financial inclusion & better cash management

Cash is king! Cash is more valuable than profit, revenue, stock or receivables, and remains critical for any businesses. It's an unavoidable necessity to pay for staff and suppliers and provides you with the necessary confidence to invest further in your businesses. Unfortunately, it is also one of the biggest challenges companies face. A recent survey by Capify found that a majority (52%) of UK small business owners are worried about their company's cash flow over the next 12 months.

Three columns to cash

There are three key columns affecting cash flow: cash coming in (accounts receivable), cash going out (accounts payable), and access to cash (equity or debt raise). If your business is spending more than it makes, and does not have access to further liquidity, then things are going to dry up quickly.

Seemingly it should be straightforward to avoid cash flow issues. Like trying to lose weight, just assure you burn more calories than you intake: spend less than you make. Nonetheless, it isn't that simple and so many great businesses with happy customers, especially smaller enterprises, suffer unnecessarily.

Five cash flow management tips

There are easy steps that businesses can take to combat cash flow issues. Here are the five we consider important.

Make getting paid easy: It is a truth universally acknowledged, that the propensity to be paid is inextricably linked to the convenience of payment. Inconvenient payment methods, such as cash and bank transfers, are subject to human inertia and human error. Few businesses hurry to pay their suppliers, but if you introduce friction to the payment process you will easily lose their attention as they look to address something less painful.

Get real-time: You need to be accepting real-time payments. Everything in life has become instant, we're impatient and we wait for nothing or nobody. I'm not sure about the moral or psychological implications here across sectors and products, but I remain confident that it is an unnecessary inefficiency for cooked meals and online shopping to arrive sooner to our doorsteps than payments do in our bank accounts. Some customers may still need to pay via card, say for retail point-of-sale businesses, which have slow settlement times, but otherwise you need to be implementing instant payments to have funds settle in real-time.

Reconcile, reconcile, reconcile: A stitch in time saves nine. Stay on top of your outstanding invoices. This is easiest done when paid invoices reconcile automatically within your accounting software, companies like Xero and QuickBooks, as achieved by Crezco. This is the quickest and most efficient way to gauge your cash flow and potential problems. Without this you're flying in the dark and suddenly things become a lot less clear. Furthermore, if paid invoices reconcile automatically, you'll save a lot of time manually handling this process and life will be a lot more pleasant.

Credit control: You can please some of the people all of the time, all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all the time. Some people are going to be slow to pay and you're going to benefit from implementing a collection process. Either employ a credit controller, a collection agency or online credit control software, like Chaser, which will send out automatic payment reminders and help with the collection process.

Cut costs: Eliminate all unnecessary costs and fees. It seems self-explanatory but undoubtedly there is room left to run things more efficiently. Find a company that can help you save around 2-3%, on all card-payments. For a company with low profit margins, say 5%, that's a 40%/60% increase in profitability. Look after the pennies, the pounds will look after themselves.

More than anything else in their businesses, smart small-business owners recognise that staying on top of their cash flow is critical for the long-term health of their company. Do these things successfully, and your company will be able to survive and thrive even in times of financial instability.

Author:

Ralph Rogge, CEO and Founder, Crezco

Crezco is a business-to-business open banking payments provider. Crezco is integrated with more than 300 banks and 400m bank accounts across the EU and UK, more than any other open banking payment API provider. Crezco makes B2B invoice payments as frictionless as card payments but without the associated costs.

Learn about the biggest investment trends and how best to manage them

In the wake of unpredictable financial markets and blurred fiscal and monetary policies from the global response to economic shutdowns, all asset owners and investors need to adapt quickly to the new financial landscape. Or otherwise face significant challenges in building and managing their portfolios in today's new normal.

Globally, Governments have been spending big on stimulus packages, and inflation is set to hit record numbers as we progress through recovery mode. We are living in unprecedented times, and we are heading into what experts agree is a highly unpredictable future for investors and businesses.

Everything is under the spotlight – from how you set return targets and manage liquidity, to how to assess external factors that would protect you from the crash.

Opportunities of a lifetime

Many SMEs are feeling the financial challenges. Even so, the market has powered higher, fuelled by expectations of a period of strong growth after the successes of the vaccine programme and as the economy fully reopens. The outlook is not doom and gloom. Far from it. Remember, it is always in the times of greatest crisis that lie the opportunities of a lifetime.

Markets are changing rapidly. Employees are resigning from their jobs at an unprecedented rate. The great resignation, as it's been named, where people are quitting at a faster rate than jobs were lost during the pandemic. Where are they going? Large numbers are following their passion and purpose to start their own enterprises, joining the £multi-billion gig economy or becoming retail investors.

Now is not the time to continue with the same investment strategies you had been doing prior to 2020. The landscape has changed rapidly, so the smartest thing is to re-look at investment from a new perspective. Learn how to maximise your investments using some of the top investor strategies that set you up for success in the digital decade. Get ready for the new roaring twenties.

Look towards disruptive technologies

Think back to the stock market crash of the 1920s, if you'd have told people then that within the next decade TVs would become readily available in people's homes and TV networks would become industry giants, they would've been doubtful. Right now, we need to look towards the disruptive technologies that will skyrocket in next 10 years.

Learn from renowned investors like Masayoshi Son, who was one of the first to invest in companies like Yahoo, Slack, Uber – all highly lucrative ventures in disruptive tech. The four key areas to focus on now are: Fintech, Edtech, Greentech, Medtech – all trillion-dollar industries that are transforming the business landscape.

We are living in a vastly different world to 20 years ago when money itself is no longer the highest transactional value. The popularity of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) has surged in 2021, and the upward trend is set to continue into 2022 and beyond.

NFTs

NFTs are basically a tool for providing proof of ownership of a digital asset that can be attached to anything from a Tweet to a JPEG image. If you aren't familiar with how it works, it's time to get to know it. Artists, influencers and celebrities are making huge profits using NFTs and their use is becoming more mainstream. Take digital artist Beeple, who sold a collection as an NFT through auction house Christies for nearly $70 million recently, making him one of the most valuable living artists in the world. In future we will see the same thing happening with physical objects as well as digital entities.

The speed of pace at which this is taking place is accelerating massively and your investment strategies need to take this into account. We are going to see property owned via NFTs and more. This allows anyone to be a collector, or trade collectibles. It opens a global marketplace to you and is transforming everything when it comes to assets.

With NFTs, tokenisation, digital ownership and digital currencies becoming the norm we will begin to see everything linked to blockchain. With digital assets, virtual land and a new digital graffiti world, we will embark on an entirely new world where we get to rewrite the rules.

The boom in NFT's is linked to the rise of the metaverse. The metaverse is, simply put, it's a 3D digital world that is soon going to replace the 2D internet. Often referred to as extended reality, the core idea of metaverse is to create a 3D virtual environment which you don't just see but become immersed in when you socialise, manage businesses, investments and more.

The Metaverse

During the next decade, digital currencies and the meta economy will grow so big that billionaires in the metaverse will be richer than the billionaires in the real world.

Ownership of digital objects that can be easily bought and sold

in the metaverse are now growing fast – from art, collectibles, games, music, property and virtual land. As the metaverse becomes planet sized and linked to our real world, digital currencies will become the new normal.

The strength of cryptocurrencies is increasing exponentially. We are seeing disruption in the property markets where increasing numbers are investing outside their normal currency and using cryptocurrencies in particular. This makes perfect sense as there's little point in your property investments going up by 20% if your currency decreases by 20%. So, think about hedging against your country as well as hedging against your asset base. Property is a key hedge against inflation.

Another key growth trend is impact investing – for profit and purpose. Millennials and Gen Z-ers are the driving force behind the conscious investor trend, motivated by their sense of purpose and values.

As we see the wealth transfer from Baby Boomers to their younger counterparts there is potential for exponential growth in impact investing over the next decade. All the key growth areas, such as greentech and edtech, offer positive impacts on society as well as high returns. Surely a win-win for everyone.

Prepare for impact investing by researching exactly what you want to be a part of, making a plan so that you know what your pathway is. It is about spotting the emerging trends and jumping in at the opportune moment.

The old rules have changed. Now it is no longer about how big your business or investments are, but how fast and nimble you can be to get into the right thing at the right time.

About the Author

Roger James Hamilton is a New York Times bestselling author and Founder and CEO of Genius Group, a multi-million-dollar group of companies including GeniusU, Entrepreneurs Institute, Entrepreneur Resorts and Genius School.

https://www.geniusgroup.net/

What you need to know about Personal Guarantees

September 2021 brought sobering news of an 18 month high in registered company insolvencies[i]. Many small and medium sized businesses are now facing a very bumpy ride as pandemic support measures such as VAT deferrals and the commercial rent moratorium, ease back. For those business owners and founders who have taken the serious step of putting their personal assets such as their home and life savings on the line to secure a business loan, this will be a very worrying time.

At Purbeck Personal Guarantee Insurance we have estimated that over 420,000 small business owners in the UK were acting as personal guarantors for business loans prior to the pandemic. By providing a personal guarantee in support of a business loan, the director is providing the lender with recourse to his/her personal estate which, in effect, lifts the veil of incorporation afforded through a Limited Company or Limited Liability Partnership. Furthermore, based on a Freedom on Information request, we have calculated that £2.1bn in CBIL loans were taken by business owners and directors which had personal guarantees attached[ii].

The problem is that SME access to finance is increasingly going to necessitate signing a Personal Guarantee as lenders become more risk averse. So if you haven't yet faced this prospect, you probably will, if or when you need new funding.

At the same time, the risk of signing a Personal Guarantee has increased following new insolvency rules introduced in December 2020 which made HMRC a preferred creditor in a business insolvency. In essence this may reduce the 'pot' of funds left to pay existing Personal Guarantee backed loans meaning that a director or business owner could find that as the loan is called in, their personal assets need to be used to settle the debtii.

It is therefore crucial SME owners and directors understand how they can mitigate the risks of signing a Personal Guarantee, with Personal Guarantee Insurance becoming an increasingly common option.

What is a Personal Guarantee?

Personal Guarantees give the lender a written promise, made by a director or number of directors, to accept liability for a company's debt. In practice, this means that if the business defaults on a loan the director's home, car and anything in their personal bank account could be called on to settle the outstanding debt. You could even find yourself facing bankruptcy if your personal assets don't cover the debt. This obviously has much longer term ramifications, including prohibiting you from being a company director in the future.

If you co-own your home, with a spouse or partner – they will also have to sign the guarantee. A minority stake holding in the business won't protect you either as a lender will go after whoever has the most chance of settling the debt.

Personal Guarantees can apply to a wide range of loan facilities including those available from P2P lending platforms – in fact at Purbeck we see most of the demand for Personal Guarantee Insurance coming from the alternative finance market. In addition, the Government backed CBILS (Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme) and the Recovery Loan Scheme permits the use of Personal Guarantees as security for loans over £250,000.

The Personal Guarantee Dilemma

Signing a Personal Guarantee to secure access to funding is a risk some small business owners are willing to take while others see it as a step too far. In a survey Purbeck Personal Guarantee Insurance conducted earlier this year amongst 1000 SME owners and directors[iii], 45% said they had decided against a loan because it required a Personal Guarantee, but 64% said they would be more likely to sign a personal guarantee if there was insurance in place to protect against the risk of providing it. Most notably, an overwhelming majority (88%) agreed that lenders and financial advisers have a duty to make business owners aware of Personal Guarantee Insurance.

Over £120m in SME Personal Guarantees Protected By Insurance

Personal Guarantee Insurance has protected over £120 million in Personal Guarantees over the last three years, giving business owners and directors the confidence to secure finance knowing that if the business fails, the majority of the loan would be paid off without risk to their home and assets. Amongst start-ups alone, loans to the value of £35million have been protected by Personal Guarantee Insurance.

Just like any other insurance it protects against the risk of the worst happening – in this instance the risk that your business fails and the guarantee is called in by the lender. Insurance will offset any outstanding obligations called in with the level of cover based on a fixed percentage of the personal guarantee the company director wishes to insure. This is dependent on whether the corresponding finance facility is secured or unsecured.

The big difference with this type of insurance is it does a lot more than simply pay out following a claim. Personal Guarantee Insurance includes access to free mentoring and support services if your business gets into financial distress,

plus the huge benefit of expert guidance at the point the debt needs to be settled. This takes a huge burden off the shoulders of the business owner.

Other ways to mitigate the risks

Before deciding that signing a Personal Guarantee is right or wrong for you, it is always important to get some independent advice. Your accountant, solicitor, commercial broker or financial adviser can all help you work out the best options for your business and advise on the additional ways you can cut the personal risks you might face by signing a personal guarantee.

For example, if you run your business with co-directors, come to an agreement to share the guarantee. You can also negotiate a time limit for the guarantee and a cap on the amount, but do remember interest and costs added to the debt can soon mount up.

You may also be able to agree terms where you are guaranteeing a part of rather than the whole loan and that settlement is sought first from company's assets before enforcing the guarantee.

Don't let a Personal Guarantee be a barrier

Whether your SME business needs funding to start, sustain or grow, a Personal Guarantee shouldn't stand in the way of the finance you need. Seek expert advice and look at the ways you can mitigate the risk, including Personal Guarantee Insurance, before signing on the dotted line.

Author:

Todd Davison, MD, Purbeck Insurance Services provider of the UK's only Personal Guarantee Insurance to the owners and directors of UK SMEs.

[i] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monthly-insolvency-statistics-august-2021/commentary-monthly-insolvency-statistics-august-2021

[ii] FOI Request in April 2021 for breakdown of CBILS loans secured over £250,000 where a personal guarantee was required by the lender, up to 31st March 2021

[iii] Survey conducted May 2021 via Cision of 1000 SME Owners and Directors

How To Bring Magic Into Your Business

If you are starting a business, you will have a long to-do list. Make sure maintaining team morale is on that list. It doesn't have to eat into your budgets but do spare the time to give it some thought. An obvious place to start is with birthdays. Everyone has them—apparently, each day, around 20.8 million people celebrate their birthday—so no co-worker will miss out. Regardless of the drawbacks of virtual cake, even if your team works from home, get everyone together on Zoom, even if just for a few minutes: everyone likes to feel special.

This got me and my team thinking about all the special occasions and celebrations that there are around the world, and the opportunities they give us to bring us a little bit of joy and magic. These are often found in tiny moments and all it takes is a little shift of perspective to really see and appreciate them. I'm a great believer in instant change, little 'micro-moments' of learning or adaptation that allow us to actively take charge of our situation and emotions in the moment, reset and bring more of our best to help ourselves and others. Each micro-moment intervention is designed to be actionable in a minute and I've written three books on these micro-moments for life, work and family.

Here are a few occasions in March could be a great excuse for more joy and magic?

8th March: International Women's Day

There are so many great women past and present, but there are two (apart from my mum) who I've been particularly in awe of.

The first is Betty Sassoon, Vidal Sassoon's mother. Sassoon spend about seven years in an orphanage as his mum couldn't make ends meet, but she was determined to get her son back, which she did. One day Betty had a powerful premonition that he would be a famous hairdresser. She was so convinced that it was true that she found a hairdressing school run by well-known stylist of the time, Adolph Cohen. Together with her son, they visited the salon to find out about the school. But Cohen told them it was a two-year programme and would cost much more money than Betty could afford so they left the salon disappointed. Sassoon recalls, "My mother looked so terribly dejected. I thought she might faint."

But a few minutes later, Mr. Cohen called them back in. He had been struck by the fact that Vidal had opened the door for his mother and didn't let his disappointment show. Cohen then told him, "You seem to have very good manners, young man. Start Monday and forget the cost." His mother began to cry with joy. Of course, Vidal Sassoon did become a famous stylist, creating the bob hairstyle and perfecting the art of blow-drying all because of his mum's determination to help him fulfil his destiny and his good manners. That one small act of kindness created the magic that created a business empire and lasting legacy.

The second woman that stands out for me is Marie Curie. Curie is recognised for her ground-breaking Nobel Prize-winning discoveries and helping to break gender barriers during her lifetime. Curie was the first person in the world, male or female, to win two Nobel Prizes. Her family won four! And she managed it all without a fancy lab. During WW1, Marie Curie developed mobile radiology units which were used at the front hospitals in Furnes, Hoogstade, Adinkerke, De Panne, Beveren and Roesbrugge. Training 150 women to operate the "Little Curie" it is estimated that the total number of wounded soldiers receiving X-ray exams during the war exceeded one million.

Marie Curie was an extraordinary person, who worked tirelessly as a scientist and a humanitarian. She never let her gender stop her, even while working in a male-dominated world. Instead, she mobilized a small army of women in an effort to reduce human suffering and win World War I.

Take a moment to think of all the amazing women in your life that bring magic to your world. Make a point of expressing your appreciation – you don't need to limit yourself to doing this on March 8th. A little more appreciation for all the people we are grateful for is a wonderful way to spread more magic and boost morale.

20th March: UN International Day of Happiness

Although happiness can mean different things to different people, one element is common to us all. And that's the messages sent by a genuine smile. This is possibly the only truly international recognisable and understandable symbol of happiness in the world. In a study conducted in the UK, British researchers found that one smile can provide the same level of brain stimulation as up to 2,000 chocolate bars; they also found that smiling can be as stimulating as receiving up to £16,000 in cash.

Psychologists have also found that even if we have to force a smile, the very act of turning your lips upward can trick our brain into releasing certain feel-good hormones, including dopamine and serotonin. As a result, our stress levels lower, our immune system gets a little boost, and our overall mood improves. Researchers have even discovered that a smile can lower our heart rate when we're feeling anxious.

It's also worth remembering that happiness is not a permanent state. Often, it's fleeting as we go about our daily activities but when we pay attention to the little moments that make us happy and revel in them, we can draw out our sense of wellbeing. Is your morning coffee just amazing or did you enjoy chatting to a client or customer? Often, it's the simplest of things like singing Happy Birthday to a colleague that sprinkles our lives with magic. We don't need the grand gestures or the amazing holiday – we just need to pay attention to some of the little things that bring us joy and wallow in them for a little longer.

Take a moment to smile at someone. Just notice the world around you and smile. Like a smile, smiling is contagious.

26th March: Make Up Your Own Holiday Day

I'm particularly excited about this one! Make Up Your Own Holiday Day was the holiday created to encourage people to do more of what they love. Now there are a tonne of interesting, intriguing and imaginative holidays already out there, like World Stationery Day (April the 22nd), National Spaghetti Day (4th of January), National Hugging Day (21st January) and National Zipper Day (April the 29th). What's fascinating is the imagination and creativity to name, create and participate in such great activities.

Take a moment to consider what your 'make up your own holiday' will be. Perhaps you could introduce something that will be fun for your team: Wear a Hat To Work Day; Donut Day; Lunchtime Quiz Day.

Whatever March brings to you and your team, enjoy the little wins, go searching for them if you have to and spread the magic around.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sid Madge is a transformation and change specialist and founder of Meee. Meee draws on the best creativity and thinking from the worlds of branding, psychology, neuroscience, education and sociology, to help people embrace change and achieve extraordinary lives.

From pupils to CEOs, Meee has helped thousands find their magic to transform themselves, their communities and their organisations. From leaders of PLCs and SMEs to parents, teachers, students, carers, the unemployed and prison inmates Meee helps people excel.

Sid Madge is also author of the 'Meee in Minute' series of books which each offer 60 ways to change your life, work-, or family-life in 60 seconds.

Web: www.meee.global

Web: www.meeebooks.com

5 Ways to Improve Communications With Your Team

Monday morning. 9am. A supplier meeting is being held in the swanky central London offices of a well-known organisation. There are 6 people present. Four from our well-known organisation and two from the supplier. The new director of strategy in the organisation has set the ambition for relationships going forward and it aligns with the business strategy of developing a spirit of partnership between organisation and supplier. The director of strategy has laid out an approach for meetings which focuses on simplifying and standardising the meeting process. As such, he has instructed that every meeting will be run along the same lines… it's a structured conversation beginning with one minute of 'pleasantries' and then straight into issues the supplier needs to get on board with.

You can imagine the impact a constraining one minute of pleasantries had on developing relationships. A sincere attempt to help all parties involved with clarity, direction and structure led to a breakdown in communication, not a bettering of it. A cursory and formal minute of polite inquiry before launching into demands led to a diminution of relationships, loss of respect, engagement, and support – and pretty much zero motivation for everyone involved.

Communicating transactionally, using command and control, applying authority and force to get things done is the reverse of what engaged and motivated people seek. Communication matters. It creates community. It's the cornerstone of any culture and our communication style is intrinsically linked to who we are. But how we communicate is largely automatic, or unconscious and our time feels better spent focusing on things we haven't yet mastered. But, as Marcus Buckingham said, 'People join organisations, and leave managers.', so, our ability to speak to our teams effectively could be the difference between success and failure, between people staying or going.

Effective communication is simple – but not easy. As an aspiration, better communication is often used as a term to describe how we deliver messages – how we transmit ideas, set direction and advance the conversation. But for respect, motivation, engagement, support and retention of people, you need to focus your communication on asking good questions and listening with skill and commitment. Daily practice and discipline are essential to developing skill and getting better as a communicator. It's not magic, but effort and ritual that transform the way we connect with people. How they respond is not in our hands, but our approach to securing a positive reaction is something we can control.

Here are 5 ways that you can focus your impact as a communicator and lead your business to greater success as a result.

Firstly, winning respect. The truth about respect is that it's a quality multiplied by giving it away – and what a valuable gift it is. Giving people respect acknowledges their status and importance, making them feel rewarded and, in turn, enhancing psychological safety. Use communication to validate the people around you:

In presentations, take the opportunity to name people whose work you admire or whose contributions have made a difference.

Thank people in meetings for challenging or offering a perspective and for asking good questions.

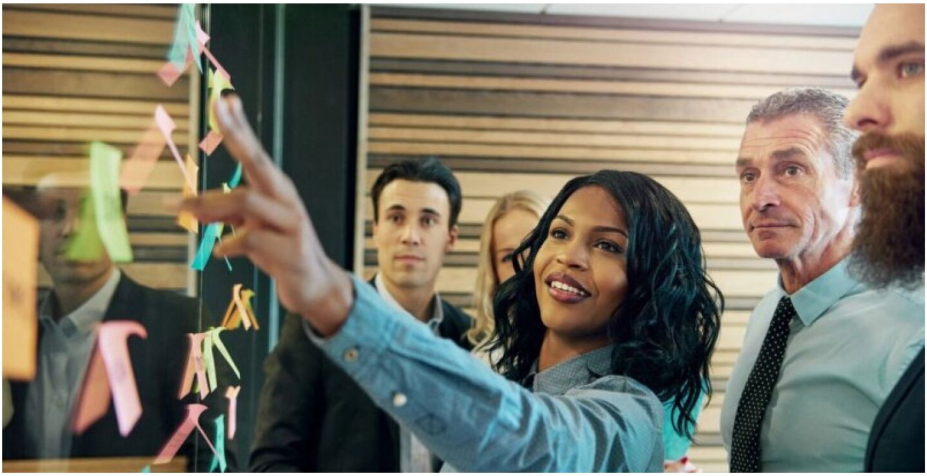
In conversations, take time to appreciate comments or feedback and to those who listen well.

Committing to this adds value in so many ways – not least because to offer recognition, you must be present and available to notice what people are saying. The result is that your acknowledgement of people will be sincere – a crucial component in winning respect.

You'll also win respect by communicating your personal values. Let people know who you are and what matters to you. We earn respect by sharing our struggles and helping others see how we have, or have not, overcome our challenges and difficulties. Respect comes from understanding – pay attention to connecting on a personal level and respect will follow.

Secondly, aim for motivation, but start with inspiration. We all want to feel surrounded by motivated and engaged people, but here, it's worth considering the semantics and impact of language. To motivate is to push – you'll be doing the work, driving the call to action and needing to role model the energy required to get you there. To motivate successfully, you may need to offer reward – keep reminding colleagues of the prize as you dangle the carrot and wield the stick in equal measure. As a communicator, it's a full-on push strategy bringing out your inner personal trainer. The motivator voice is strong, pacey, and tireless. To inspire, though, is a different matter involving an inner connection to ambition and aspiration. Get curious about what matters to your people by creating conversations that probe a little deeper and then communicate the connection between what you are seeking to achieve and what matters to them. To inspire is to pull people in – tell stories, use coaching questions, and use phrases like 'Let's imagine…' and 'What if…'.

Thirdly, your ability to engage people must be a leadership priority. Engaged people go the extra mile, creating good energy in the business and when they talk about the business.



This energy is infectious, and your communication plays a big part in creating the conditions that foster it.

A simple strategy is to have as many conversations across the business as possible – talk to everyone you can to find out what's going on and how people are really feeling. Don't be a surprise visitor to anyone that engages with your business, but be the leader that is spontaneous, curious, and open. Pay attention to your own energy here – if you feel flat, drained, or overwhelmed, you won't be able to listen well, and your people will feel your heart is not really 'in it'. Think in shifts and allow yourself downtime to recharge your communication batteries.

Next, you'll need to make sure you support your people. `The dictionary definition of support is to bear weight or offer material assistance. It sounds like an active process and yet, to enable your people to feel supported as you communicate requires something much more challenging; to support is to listen. Leaders and founders of businesses are often driven by a desire to move things forward, change things for the better and this proactive mindset is all about offering solutions. As a communicator, this is risky. Recognising the need for support might well tempt you to give advice and help the other person see the clear way forward, but this strips a person of their autonomy. Start with listening – challenge yourself to use silence, encourage them to share more when they start speaking, play back to them the words they use that you find significant and summarise what you've heard them say… without offering a word of advice or pushing a solution. As their conversation comes to a conclusion, you can ask if they'd like your view.

Finally, if your people feel heard, understood and cared about, they will find it hard to move away from your business because they will feel connected to it – and you. But, as a communicator, there's an active step to take to retain your great people and that is to communicate a future that is shared by, and tailored to, them. This is where you need to speak publicly – and frequently – about the business purpose, the vision and what you want for the people who work alongside you. Work at using the senses as you describe where you're going – detail how it looks, what it sounds like, how it feels. Use this sensory narrative to bring tiny details to life and build a compelling and rich picture of what's on the horizon. We all need something to look forward to – a future we can imagine. Create a narrative where your people play a key role and can see themselves alongside you growing a successful business they can be proud of and responsible for. They'll stay.

Author: Janie Van Hool is a prominent communication expert specialising in leadership development programmes and executive coaching. Janie teaches the art of communication, presence and impact to professionals in a range of organisations, from the construction industry to investment banking. As Founder and Director of VoicePresence, Janie has worked as a workshop facilitator and 1:1 coach for more than 20 years, enhancing the communication skills of executives and creating listening company cultures. She also has extensive experience in developing and delivering high potential leadership programmes for graduates – and teaches at some of the world's top business schools including the Ashridge Hult flagship senior executive leadership programme.

Janie is also the acclaimed author of The Listening Shift: Transform your organization by listening to your people and helping your people listen to you (Practical Inspiration, 2021). The book explores the power of listening, which often flies under the radar when it comes to communication in business. It is the ultimate guide to learning how to cut through the noise and listen expertly. The Listening Shift draws on the learning and experiences she has gained as a RADA-trained classical actress, a voice teacher (she has an MA in Voice Studies), from her research into Performance Psychology at Edinburgh University, and from her years volunteering as a listener for Samaritans in the UK.

https://www.voicepresence.co.uk/

How a Team Training Course Can Boost Employee Morale

Team Building Courses are an ideal way to increase staff satisfaction and boost morale. These courses are designed to promote teamwork in the workplace, helping employees to get to know each other better as well as trust each other more. A team training course will offer practical tips and advice on working successfully with others and make your employees feel more empowered. Here's how.

Higher staff satisfaction

Job dissatisfaction is a common reason for staff turnover. When you are running a business, a happy and healthy team is important to the success of your company. Employees who feel appreciated and supported are more likely to be productive, which leads to higher satisfaction at the workplace. But keeping your employees happy isn't always easy. It involves planning activities that make them feel valued in the organization. A team-building course can help your staff develop a better understanding of their role and how they fit into the bigger picture of your office environment. Not only will this make them feel like part of a team but it will also boost morale by encouraging them to see how their individual efforts contribute toward the success of your company.

Continued professional development

Allowing employees to stay challenged in their jobs and continue to develop their skills is one of the best ways an organization can retain top talent. The challenge lies in getting employees to take advantage of opportunities they are offered to continue developing professionally. Some employees will be eager to expand their skills and knowledge, while others may not consider it important enough to make time for it.

Adding a team training program can help motivate employees to embrace continued professional development as a way to improve their careers and increase their earning potential. They will see they aren't alone in this effort and will likely become more enthusiastic about taking advantage of the opportunities presented to help them build skills and enhance job satisfaction.

Improved teamwork

Hiring employees is just half of the equation. If you aren't giving them the tools and knowledge they need to succeed, it is not going to matter how good your instincts were when you chose them. A team training course will help you improve employee communication skills. This means that you will have better coordination with each other, so mistakes will be less likely to happen and production time will be reduced.

The training will also create camaraderie among employees. It will help them learn to get along with each other when working as a team and support one another when making decisions, which would directly reduce their reliance on the immediate supervisor for support and guidance.

More happiness due to a higher self-worth

Treating employees like a team and not just a group of people can build up employee morale and help increase their self-worth. And one way to boost employee morale is by providing professional training courses for your staff. It will lead them to be more productive, which in turn will lead to a higher profit for your business. This can also translate into greater efficiency in the workplace as employees will feel empowered to do their jobs well. The result of this is happy customers who will come back and keep purchasing from your business.

Better workplace culture and loyalty

Team training courses can help your employees become better at working together by building trust and creating positive, supportive relationships. If your employees know how to communicate with each other effectively and resolve conflicts in a healthy way, they will be able to focus on their work instead of worrying about their interpersonal relationships with coworkers.

Your employees will also be able to do their jobs more efficiently if they are familiar with the usual tasks and responsibilities of their position as well as those of other positions on the team.

Additionally, team training courses are a great way to engage employees. And when your employees feel more engaged, the work environment becomes more open to new ideas and more welcoming to new employees. Plus, knowing that everyone on the team has received the same training allows for better communication and collaboration between coworkers.

Low employee turnover

High turnovers can often be a sign that there is something wrong with your business's culture, so you will want to address any underlying problems before they become even bigger issues.

The purpose of employee team training is not to transform your employees into super workers, but rather to help them develop and discover their individual strengths. This will allow them to work together more effectively as a cohesive unit and ultimately increase productivity across the board – which makes employees feel more accomplished at their current roles and less inclined to leave.

How to ace speaking opportunities by using your voice to best effect

As entrepreneurs you'll be used to running meetings and giving presentations online. Or you certainly will have become used to this way of working over the last couple of years. But are you communicating the best way possible with your investors, customers, team members and suppliers?

I was inspired by watching the classic movie The Wizard of Oz recently. Using this frame, and accompanied by the Scarecrow, the Lion and the Tin Man, let's consider some of the tools we need to be effective speakers that will help us to drive our businesses forward.

We need a brain, of course. We need to be able to think clearly about what we're going to be saying. Speaking coherently is very difficult without a brain. We also need courage. Whether you're giving your first-ever presentation in a brand-new role, or you're tasked with pitching for a big client; you'll need a certain amount of courage every time you speak. But, most important for speakers, is the heart. To keep an audience entertained, especially if you're speaking online, you'll need heart. You'll need bags of passion, energy, enthusiasm, and vibrance.

For me, there's only one true outlet for the heart – and that's through your voice. The way we use our voice when we speak determines whether our words live or die. An audience, struggling to stay awake and alert, will find it much easier to listen to us deliver poor content in a lively, engaging way, than they will when we're giving them pearls of wisdom or outlining an important business opportunity in a dull and dreary manner. The problem is that so many of us find it so difficult to add effective cadence to our voice when we speak. And for entrepreneurs it is particularly important to recognise and address this issue.

To go back to the Wizard of Oz, for good communication we need a brain. We need to be able to think clearly about what we're going to be saying and speak coherently. We also need courage. Whether you're pitching to potential investor, or you're giving a presentation to a potential big customer; you'll need a certain amount of courage for every public speaking situation. But, most important for startup founders when speaking, is the heart.

To keep an audience engaged, especially if you're speaking online, you will need heart. You'll need bring plenty of passion, energy, enthusiasm, and vibrance. In my view, there's only one true outlet for the heart – and that's through your voice. An audience, struggling to stay awake and alert, would find it much easier to listen to us deliver poor content in a lively, engaging way, than they would listen to us provide important content with a dreary delivery.

Here are some activities you can undertake to help you add cadence and interest to your voice and give standout presentations that people will respond to positively.

Be yourself but bigger

I've lost count of the number of times I've suggested to clients that they add more vocal variety to their speaking, and they say, "Well, it's just not me. I'd be embarrassed to do silly voices."

I said the same thing when I started out with my speaking. But it's important to understand that nobody is asking you not to be you. Simply use your voice to add passion and heart to your speaking. When you speak, you should be you. But you should be a bigger, an exaggerated version of you.

People often tell me they can't believe the difference between the me that speaks on stage and the me that goes for dinner with them afterwards. I'm the same person in both situations, of course. However, the stage me understands that to engage an entire audience – I must be an exaggerated version of myself, and I need to make the effort to really exaggerate my voice. You can do this too. Be prepared to exaggerate your voice, modulate your voice, and use YOUR voice to help us go on an entrepreneurial journey with you.

Listen Back to Your Performance

When you're working on your vocal variety listen back to yourself. Some time ago, I gave a speech using the story of the Three Little Pigs to illustrate a key point. I decided to give different voice for each pig to add interest. I gave the talk and I really worked hard on each of my pig voices.

Afterwards, a friend of mine called me and said, "Great talk, Dan. I loved your story. My only suggestion would be that you use a different voice for each of the pigs. Make it a bit more fun and engaging for the audience."
That evening I nerved myself to watch the recording of my talk. How right she was. All three pigs had the same voice!

As speakers and entrepreneurs it is important to recognise that the voice we hear in our head isn't the voice other people hear when we speak. Record yourself when speaking, or rehearsing. It can be tough to listen to our own voices played back to us. But try it. You'll hear what everyone else hears and you'll discover if there really is any variety in your voice.

I thought I was doing a distinct voice for each little pig. However, I needed to exaggerate those voices far more. As entrepreneurs we need to be resilient so don't be embarrassed. We might feel we're being too silly and we're adding too much – but to the audience, it's not enough.

Listen to yourself as often as possible. This will help you build your speaking skills which will be invaluable as your business grows.

Give new things a try

Most of us didn't choose the accent we have. But we have one because we listened to the people around us as we grew up.

We begin mimicking voices from the moment we start speaking. So, why not do this with our public speaking too? I find it helpful to mimic the vocal style of people I see on TV. After all, if we're going to be presenting online, we're essentially looking for the same vocal qualities that broadcasting professionals have.

It might be an actor, a comedian or a news anchor. It is good to mimic any kind of TV or film entertainers because they're usually the ones doing the most with their voices to try to engage us. This doesn't mean you should start trying to do impressions of them. There might just be little things here and there that you like. Small things they do that you can try and incorporate into your own speaking when you're on stage.

Let's have a look at some specific tools we have at our disposal if we want to use our voices to create more engaging talks.

Use High and Low Volume
Changing your volume can enhance the engagement your audience feels. If you're online, lean towards the camera and whisper something that might be a secret or a reveal for your audience. If you're in person – do the same by leaning towards your audience in the seats in front of you.

Shout out the punchline to a joke or a big realisation.
Modulate your volume as you speak. A sudden change from a lower volume to a higher one can really jump-start your audience and bring them back into a speech that they might have been drifting away from.

Use Pace to grab attention
Varying the pace at which we speak helps us win the battle for our audience's attention. If we speak at one pace the entire time, an audience quickly becomes used to it. They quickly become bored by it. They quickly stop listening to it.Think of ways you can really vary the speed at which you're talking as you move through your talk. You might be telling us a story where everything is happening very quickly and frantically, and you'll speed up your voice to emphasise that. Or you may want to powerfully deliver an important message and you'll slow down the pace and really give the audience time to take it in.

Express Emotion with changing pitch
Your ability to change your pitch is the most important vocal tool you have at your disposal. It is like painting a picture and adding colour. It'll include using a deeper voice or a higher voice, but it's also how you'll express your emotions as you speak, for example, sadness, happiness, laughter, pain, joy, guilt, tiredness, sympathy, sarcasm. There are so many ways of saying the same sentence but using a different pitch to convey emotions. Have a play with the following sentences and convey happiness, then fatigue, sarcasm, relief:

"This looks like an amazing business opportunity." "It is so delightful to see you."

By changing how you use your voice you can get across different emotions to your audience.

In conclusion
Developing communication skills is vital for entrepreneurs. It is not just about writing a good presentation. How we use our voices will make a huge different to the impact of what we say. So, take the opportunity to record yourself and work though the tips above to increase your effectiveness as a business communicator.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dan Magill is a member of Toastmasters International, a not-for-profit organisation that has provided communication and leadership skills since 1924 through a worldwide network of clubs. There are more than 400 clubs and 10,000 members in the UK and Ireland. Members follow a structured educational programme to gain skills and confidence in public and impromptu speaking, chairing meetings and time management. To find your nearest club, visit www.toastmasters.org

How To Be A More Efficient Business Owner

Being an entrepreneur is hard. As a business owner, you are responsible for every aspect of your business – from the financials to managing your team to keeping the lights on and innovating new ideas.

It is no wonder that entrepreneurs are some of the hardest-working people. But being busy doesn't always equate to being productive, and it is easy to get distracted by unimportant tasks when you run a business. As Abu Dhabi's leading Personal Assistant Agency, we have worked with enough business owners to know what causes efficiency issues even in the most dedicated business owners. So, we have put together a brief guide to help you avoid the pitfalls.

Accept that not everything will go as planned

The first thing that every entrepreneur needs to learn is that you need to be flexible and adaptable because there will be times when things don't work out the way you expected them to. This is why you need to be prepared to pivot if necessary.

Let's say for example that you launch a new product but sales aren't as high as expected and you're losing money on each sale. The most profitable thing to do here would be to cut your losses and stop production until you can find a way to improve the product or reduce the cost of manufacturing.

The key is to be ready for the worst and have a contingency plan in place, so you can minimize the impact and get back on track quickly to prevent your productivity from taking a hit.

Have a routine

So much time is wasted going from one thing to the next without really thinking about what you should actually be doing. A routine gives you direction and keeping to it means you will be able to get more done in less time. It is also great for structuring your time and making sure that you focus on the most important tasks. Whether it is working out in the morning or staying away from social media during the day – any kind of routine can help you avoid distractions that might keep you from getting things done.

Besides, as an entrepreneur, your life is anything but ordinary. You are doing a ten-person job alone and combating problems as they present themselves. In such a case, having a routine can instil a sense of normalcy in your life.

You can create a daily schedule that includes everything you need to do for your business and make it a point to follow it. Something as simple as that can make a huge difference in your efficiency levels.

Make time for networking

Networking is an important part of running a small business, but you might find yourself putting it on the back burner because of other tasks. However, being a more efficient business owner in 2022 means that you will need to make time for networking.

While it is good to stay inside your office and focus on the work that needs to be done, it is also important to connect with other people who are doing similar things as yourself or even those who are pursuing a different route than yours altogether. This will help you build valuable relationships with others in your community, which could lead to new partnerships or business opportunities down the road.

Make time for yourself

While it is absolutely essential to socialise as a business owner, making time for yourself is more important than anything.
Don't overwork yourself. It can be tempting to take on extra hours when you have deadlines coming up or need to get something finished but working longer hours isn't always the answer. Remember there's no senior above you, so you have to be your own policeman.

It may seem like you aren't getting any work done because there just isn't enough time in the day. But if you spend too much time at work, then you will get burnt out, which is what leads to mistakes and slower progress overall. Take time away from the office whenever you can as it can be a huge help with your mental health. Try to set aside an hour or two every day where you don't look at your phone or emails. Just sit by yourself, soaking in your thoughts. That's the best kind of self-care that there is.

Learn the art of delegation

One of the greatest qualities of a good business owner is their ability to recognise their own limitations. As much as you might try, it is not possible for one person to handle every aspect of their business by themselves. If there are parts of your company that you can't do yourself or just aren't good at, consider hiring someone who can do those things instead of trying to do them yourself.

Hire someone who can do what you can't. Provide a clear objective and allow them to find the best way to reach it. Delegate! And once you have delegated a task to someone, don't micromanage them. That said, it is possible not to find a suitable replacement for yourself. So, if you can't find somebody trustworthy enough, why not let a Personal Assistant Agency help you find the right person for your job – whether your requirement is domestic or commercial.

https://melissaps.com/

5 Ways To Make Sure Your Company Is Inclusive & Diverse

Diverse workforces are generally better for business. They lead to a better bottom line and higher employee satisfaction while improving the workplace environment by fostering a culture of inclusion. Here are 5 actionable steps to make your company more inclusive

Set up an inclusion committee

The goal of an inclusion committee is to bring together people from all backgrounds, experiences, and levels to share ideas and learn from each other. That's why it is important for your inclusion committee to include people from a variety of roles, departments, races, genders, and experience levels.

An inclusion committee can have a range of roles, but it should be focused on providing advice and support to senior leaders on how to make the company more inclusive, rather than acting as a disciplinary body.

Once you have the committee in place, have them work with HR on collecting data on the current state of diversity within the business. This will help you identify problem areas and also set goals for improvement. Then, have the committee devise an action plan for achieving them that includes a timeline for when they will be met. It is important that this plan includes measurable metrics.

For instance, you could have percentage increases for women or minorities hired over last year's numbers at regular intervals throughout the year, so there is accountability on both sides involved.

Educate your leaders on diversity and inclusion

More than anything, your company's leadership ought to be aligned. If your leaders don't understand why diversity and inclusion are important, then you have a bigger problem at hand. Leaders are largely responsible for people's happiness and success — which means they should be leading the charge when it comes to creating an inclusive environment.

But inclusive leadership isn't the only key to a better workplace. It is also important to have leaders who are empowered to make decisions on the spot and bring their authentic selves to work. And education – from unconscious bias training to how to hire and interview people from diverse backgrounds – is one way to do this.

You also need strong, visible allies at every level of your company. These people may not necessarily be in senior positions but they ought to be champions for diversity and inclusion.

Encourage feedback

People want to feel heard at work, so encourage feedback from employees and act on it when possible. Asking for feedback will show employees that their opinions matter and that their input is welcome. Not only will this help you make your company more inclusive but will also ensure the employees feel that they have a stake in the organization's decision-making process. Besides, employees who feel included and respected at work are more engaged, more productive, and more likely to stay.

Establish a culture of trust and respect

The reason diversity is important is that if we only engage people from one type of background, we are bound to end up with the same results. That said, diversity without inclusion isn't enough. Inclusion means engaging everyone in the organization – ensuring everyone feels safe and respected enough to contribute their ideas.

In fact, inclusion and diversity go hand-in-hand: If you are not inclusive, you are missing out on valuable input from different perspectives; if you are not diverse, you are ignoring the talent that could add value to your company.

Therefore, you must make sure everyone knows what your organization stands for, why you care about diversity, and why all employees should be treated with respect, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds.

You need to give your employees an equal opportunity to speak up and share their ideas without a sense of judgment or fear of failure and embarrassment. They need to feel comfortable with expressing themselves freely at work, which will lead to better collaboration between team members from different backgrounds.

You must also allow them to challenge each other respectfully. And most importantly, you must make sure that senior leadership models these behaviors so that others feel comfortable doing so, as well.

Review your screening process

One of the most important steps to making sure your company is hiring a diverse group of candidates is to review the search process. and we aren't talking about the fact that it is easy for bias to slip into questions during the interview process, even if it was unintentional.

Instead, it is more about your recruitment sources. 80% of the job openings aren't advertised because whenever there is a vacancy, the position is either filled by an in-house resource or through a referral.

The problem is that if you hire employees through referrals, you are likely to end up with the same kind of people. This is why it is important to branch out.

https://savannah-group.com/

Imposter Syndrome : Uncomfortable but Necessary

When we embark on something new it's normal to feel self doubt and fear. We've all felt that feeling. Sometimes that self-doubt can manifest itself into something else. Feeling like you're not good enough, that your achievements are not valid and that any minute you are going to get found out and 'called-out' because you're a fraud! This is what imposter syndrome looks like.

Effects of imposter syndrome could include; dismissing your strengths, capabilities and achievements as pure luck (rather than down to hard work), not speaking your truth because you fear everyone else knows more, feeling like you need to constantly prove yourself. You might feel like a failure when you ask others for their support. And the kicker with imposter syndrome is that it can hit at any point, not just when something is totally new. This can side-line people and make that doubt even deeper.

I help clients with understanding and overcoming their imposter syndrome. That doesn't mean I am immune to it. In fact, the most successful of people often face this feeling the most. I am no stranger to this feeling. I remember a time not long after I had gained my qualification as a life coach and launched my business. I was on a video call with some of my peer coaches. I was excited about chatting and reflecting, sharing our passions, commitments and experiences together. I got on the call and as others started to talk the feeling hit me like a thick heavy fog.

That little voice was saying, "What are you doing here!" "Everyone else is smarter, better, more qualified to do this." "What have you got to bring to the table?!" Full-blown imposter syndrome had kicked in! Even though these were my peers and just qualified with me, even though I had clients I was working with and had a group programme I was running, those thoughts of doubt came flooding in. I started thinking that I was not good enough to be there and any minute someone would ask me a question and would discover I was a fraud.

But guess what, none of that happened! Because what I was thinking was not actually true. The reality was that we probably all felt nervous. We probably all felt a bit of doubt and comparison, that's what we all do! When I started talking to others and listening to what others were saying I realised that we all felt the same. That started to break down the self-doubt and the fears and replace it with gratitude and excitement and my confidence came back in.

So why do we get it? Imposter syndrome is actually part of our internal safety mechanism. It is part of our brain keeping us from doing something that might harm us. But our brain does not know the difference between what is really a threat and something that's a bit scary because it's out of our comfort zone. That's where our conscious mind needs to step in. That's where we need to take control and notice where our brain is trying to keep us safe. And we get to choose whether to listen to it, or tell it to be quiet! It's only through my ongoing personal development journey that I have been able to tune into this. Before I had the tools and knowledge I thought I was just not good enough. Here are some steps and actions that have helped me to notice imposter syndrome coming in, and give it the boot when I need to.

1. Let it go! Let go of the pressure and expectations you put on yourself. Just show up, that is enough to start. Especially when you are starting something new, be kind to yourself and let go of the need to be perfect.

2. Practice gratitude. Gratitude is the antithesis to fear. When you focus on what you feel grateful for, it not only focuses on the positive aspects of your life and circumstances, but it also actively pushes out doubt, fear and negative thoughts. Write a daily gratitude list and include your achievements, either in a journal, your phone, a piece of paper. It not only helps to reframe your thoughts towards gratitude but it's also something to come back to and remind yourself of all the things you have achieved.

3. Get to know your strengths, celebrate and be proud of them. We all have them! These are what make you as amazing as you are. Think about a time when you have pushed yourself out of your comfort zone and achieved something. If you're struggling to think about your strengths, ask the people around you.

4. Challenge your negative inner critic. If you're feeling like you can't do something or you're not good enough, ask yourself if that is actually true. Is there evidence to say you can't do something or evidence to support you are not good enough. The chances are there is no solid evidence, it is a feeling. That feeling of doubt or fear might feel uncomfortable but remember it's just a feeling, it does not have to stop you going for what you want. And it certainly does not mean you can't do something.

5. Read and learn about the success stories of others. You'll soon realise that nobody is immune to doubt, fear or this feeling of imposter syndrome. It does not make you weak or in need of fixing. Often being aware of it, labelling it and understanding it is the first step to overcoming it.

6. Talk. The best thing I did was talk. I talked to my peers, my friends, my family. Talking to my peers helped me realise that we all have doubts, but that we are all good enough to be there!

So how do I feel now? Now that I understand it, Will I ever feel it again? Absolutely! There's no doubt I will experience it again, and again. Because I am ambitious and bold and brave, which means I will keep stepping out of my comfort zone and my brain will keep trying to keep me safe. But that doubt and fear is normal, and it's ok. And I will keep noticing it, validating it, and letting it go.

By Danielle Thornton-Walker, leading Self Love and Empowerment Coach https://www.daniellelouisecoaching.com/

The Power of Self Marketing

Has the following ever happened to you? One of your co-workers got the promotion you wanted, even though their professional credentials and achievements at work were not as good as yours. Unfair? Perhaps. But maybe it was simply because your colleague was better at "selling" their achievements than you. As an entrepreneur, I have noticed time and again that there are two types of people: There are employees who quietly and modestly go about their work, but whose performance (unfortunately!!) doesn't gain the recognition it deserves because their boss doesn't even notice what they really do. Then there are others who have learned a lesson from chickens! Yes, you read that correctly. Chickens cluck every time they lay an egg. And that is exactly what you should learn to do.

And what is true for employees is even more so for the self-employed and for entrepreneurs – both small and large. At a time when we are flooded with information through the media and online, it is less important than ever before to simply be good at something. Anyone who believes that "quality will prevail on its own," "the cream will always rise to the top," or "you shouldn't blow your own trumpet" will have to accept it as they are passed over for promotion by colleagues who know how to build "the brand me."

"You can have the greatest movie in the world, but if you don't get it out there, if people don't know about it, you have nothing. It's the same with poetry, with painting, with writing, with inventions!" These are the words of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who, at the beginning of his career, took a stroll through downtown Munich wearing nothing more than a skimpy pair of posing briefs. He had asked a friend to call some journalists: "You remember Schwarzenegger who won the stone-lifting contest? Well, now he's Mr. Universe, and he's at Stachus Square in his underwear." The next day he was in the newspapers. Schwarzenegger is one of the most famous people in the world. He owes his unusual career – as a bodybuilder, Hollywood star, politician and entrepreneur – to his sales talent. There have been many bodybuilders since with bigger muscles than Schwarzenegger, but none of them were so good at selling. That's why you don't know their names, but you know his.

Some people believe it is enough to be "good" at something because quality will eventually prevail on its own. That is naive. If that were the case, companies such as Mercedes or Apple could have stopped their advertising and PR campaigns decades ago.

Even people we don't normally associate with self-marketing owe much of their fame to their ability to build their personal brand, even those who claim that fame is a nuisance to them. Even Albert Einstein, the most popular scientist in history, asked himself in one of his famous verses whether it was he or his admirers who were really "crazy":

"Wherever I go and wherever I stay,

There's always a picture of me on display,

On top of the desk, or out in the hall,

Tied around a neck, or hung on a wall.

Women and men, they play a strange game,

Asking, beseeching: 'Please sign your name.'

From the erudite fellow they brook not a quibble

But firmly insist on a piece of his scribble.

Sometimes, surrounded by all this good cheer,

I'm puzzled by some of the things that I hear,

And wonder, for a moment, my mind not hazy,

If I and not they could really be crazy?"

But no one becomes truly famous by chance or against their will, at least not over years and decades. In my book How People Become Famous, I take the examples of twelve famous figures to show that, although they all complained from time to time about the annoying side effects of fame, they also all consciously strove for it and spent a lot of time and energy on self-promotion.

Take Einstein again: The photo of him sticking his tongue out at the world became famous. It was taken on his 72nd birthday and shows his successful transformation from man to metaphor. Einstein himself chose a detail from the photo, had the image cropped, printed and sent to friends and colleagues. The image became his ultimate trademark and a pop motif for posters, buttons and T-shirts.

Einstein cultivated the image of the scientist who attached little importance to clothing, hated collars and ties, did not comb his long hair, wore no socks and left his shirts open. Asked about his profession, he once quipped, "Fashion model." Rumor has it that as soon as photographers approached, Einstein mussed up his hair with both hands to restore his quintessential image as an eccentric professor.

Einstein certainly didn't become famous for the theory of relativity, because 99.99 percent of the people who cheered him whenever he appeared in public didn't understand it. Then there's Stephen Hawking, who became the most famous scientist of recent decades, despite the fact that he never won the Nobel Prize. He once confessed: "To my colleagues, I'm just another physicist, but to the wider public I became possibly

the best-known scientist in the world." He understood the art of self-promotion like no other scientist since Einstein. Hawking – unlike most other scientists – was not prepared to settle for a life writing technical essays that would only ever be interesting and comprehensible to his scientific peers or giving lectures at specialist conferences.

When negotiating with publishers, he demanded that his next book should be available in airport bookstores all across America: "If I was going to spend the time and effort to write a book, I wanted it to get to as many people as possible." That in itself is an unusual attitude for a theoretical physicist. In fact, his book A Brief History of Time spent 147 weeks on The New York Times bestseller list and a new record 237 weeks on the London Times bestseller list. It has been translated into forty languages and sold ten million copies. How many people ever fully understood the book is another question.

Hawking, with great self-awareness, once explained: "Undoubtedly, the human interest story of how I have managed to be a theoretical physicist despite my disability has helped." A marketing genius, he built himself into a brand, turning the disadvantage of his disability into a distinctive brand feature. He even patented the computerised voice he used to communicate.

You don't have to aim to become as famous as Einstein, Hawking or Schwarzenegger. But you can certainly learn a lot from them. Above all, this: It's not enough to be good. You also have to make sure that others take notice. Do something good – and talk about it!

Dr. Rainer Zitelmann is a historian and sociologist. He is also a world-renowned author (he has written 25 books), successful businessman and real estate investor. His latest book: How People Become Famous : Geniuses of self-marketing from Albert Einstein to Kim Kardashian –(https://how-people-become-famous.com) was published in November 2021.

The Art of Goal Setting

Many people spend time at the end of every year taking stock and setting goals for the year ahead. I've been doing exactly that for decades. I have established a tradition of writing down my goals for the upcoming year on the afternoon of New Year's Eve. And, of course, I check to see which of my goals from last year I achieved. I know many successful people who do the same. But there are probably many more people who give little thought to setting goals.

According to a study conducted by the University of Scranton, only 8 percent of people actually achieve their New Year's resolutions by the end of the calendar year, while around 80 percent have failed to live up to their good intentions to improve their lives by as early as mid-February, says U.S. clinical psychologist Joseph Luciani. Given findings such as these, some 'experts' advise people that it is better to set no goals at all, or to set smaller, more easily achievable goals, in order to avoid guilt-driven remorse and frustration. When it comes to setting goals, the terms 'small' and 'realistic' are frequently used as synonyms. By this logic, small goals are seen to be reasonable and attainable while ambitious goals are unrealistic and unachievable.

However, scientific Goal-Setting Theory says exactly the opposite: There is a linear relationship between the degree of goal difficulty and performance. Specific, difficult goals lead to higher performance than no goals as well as vague, abstract goals such as 'do your best.' Edwin A. Locke und Gary P. Latham are the pioneers of goal-setting theory. In this two sentences above, Locke summarises the core of a theory that has been confirmed by hundreds of psychological experiments over the past few decades: First, the goals you set yourself need be specific and, second, they should not be too easy to achieve. People who set themselves no goals, unambitious goals or vaguely formulated goals will achieve less in life than people who set themselves specific, challenging goals.

In many ways it is actually easier to achieve challenging goals than small ones because bigger goals are the source of far greater motivational power than small goals. Arnold Schwarzenegger is a great example. In 1966, when Arnold Schwarzenegger was only 19 years old, he had a conversation with Rick Wayne during the Mr. Universe championship in London. The journalist, a bodybuilder himself, later recalled that Schwarzenegger had asked him: "Do you think a man can get whatever he wants?" The question had puzzled Wayne, who replied: "A man's got to know his limitations." Schwarzenegger did not agree with him: "You're wrong." Wayne, who was older and more experienced and had traveled widely, found himself growing increasingly annoyed by the cocky young upstart from Austria: "What do you mean, I am wrong?" To which Schwarzenegger responded: "A man can get anything he wants – provided he's willing to pay the price for it."

This episode is taken from Laurence Leamer's biography Fantastic. The Life of Arnold Schwarzenegger. When Leamer's book was published in 2005, Schwarzenegger was governor of California, then ranking eighth in the Top Ten of the largest economies in the world. Before embarking on a political career, he had been a Hollywood star earning 30 million dollars and more for each of his films, one of the best-paid actors in the world. Schwarzenegger, who had moved to the United States at the age of 21, had become a multimillionaire by investing in real estate, and up to now has earned several hundred million dollars.

Schwarzenegger himself attributes his success largely to the determination and commitment with which he pursues his goals. "I set a goal, visualise it very clearly, and create the drive, the hunger, for turning it into reality." He did not say: "Well, it would be nice if I could make this work, maybe I should give it a go." That kind of attitude will not get you anywhere. Most people, he observes, "do it in a conditional way. … Wouldn't it be nice if that happened. That's not enough. You have to make a big emotional commitment into it, that you want it very much, that you love the process and will take all the steps to achieve your goal."

Arnold Schwarzenegger is just one of the incredibly successful people I profile in my book Dare to Be Different and Grow Rich. Another is Howard Schultz, who was born the son of an unskilled laborer in Brooklyn in 1953 and grew up in a deprived neighborhood. He turned his company Starbucks into a leading brand with more than 33,000 branches worldwide. He prefaced his autobiography by advising readers: "Dream more than others think practical. Expect more than others think possible." Larry Page, the cofounder of Google, is a strong proponent of what he calls "a healthy disregard for the impossible." He lives by the maxim: "You should try to do things that most people would not."

The only reason some people don't set ambitious goals is because they're afraid they might fail to achieve them. Is that how you feel? Gordon Moore, the American IT Pioneer and cofounder of Intel, once observed that, "If everything you try works, then you are not trying hard enough." And Elon Musk said: "Failure is an option here. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough." Being a winner doesn't mean being somebody who never fails. On the contrary, winners set themselves ambitious goals and experiment until they achieve them. They don't ask for foolproof guarantees before trying something. They realise and accept that a lot of the things they try won't work. As the Woody Allen once said, "If you don't fail now and again, it's a sign you're playing it safe." So, set much bigger goals for your life – and start now. If you don't do this because you are afraid of failure, then the truth is that you have already failed.

Author
Rainer Zitelmann is the author of 25 books. His book https://daretobedifferentandgrowrich.com/ has been published in 12 languages and explores the fundamental attitudes and techniques that will help you achieve even the most ambitious goals.

SUCCESS

5 Essential Tips For Moving Your Business Online

No matter what industry you work in, the only thing that's constant is change and how you move forward with your brand. This couldn't be any truer for business owners who want to connect with consumers online and create new growth opportunities.

To do this, you'll need to bring your brick-and-mortar store into the digital world, and it doesn't have to be a difficult process. To help make the transition easier, I've put together five of my top tips for moving a business online.

1.Start with a website

Firstly, you should think about creating a website for your business. You'll need to think about the type of platform your website needs to be built on; this will vary depending on your needs and your industry.

For example, if you own a fashion business, then Shopify is an ideal platform, because it's specifically designed for eCommerce and makes it easy to sell products.

On the other hand, if you want a website that's content-rich then WordPress may be more suitable. WordPress is a popular platform for blogging and has plenty of helpful widgets to enhance the customer experience.

Whatever platform you choose, make sure you do your research to find what works best for you and your business.

Don't forget, you'll also need to choose a domain name for the website of your online store. It's good practice to have a domain name that matches the name of your business so your customers will recognise it immediately when they search online. When picking a domain name, make sure you try to keep it short and easy to understand, plus if you're trying to target a local audience, then .uk or .us may be most appropriate.

2.Think about how people will find you

Having a website is great, but now you need to make sure people can find you. Thinking about your local presence is a great way to get started, along with relying on referrals from others.

A great first step you can take is building a Google My Business page. This creates a free online listing for your business, that allows you to add a description and photos, along with your contact details and address, meaning people can find your business in local searches. This is great if you still have a physical presence and want to drive footfall to your location.

Another great mechanism on Google My Business is the reviews platform. Recommendations, referrals and word of mouth still work online as a great way to win new business. Make sure you are delivering exceptional service and ask your customers to leave you a review. This will help you to grow your audience and build credibility online.

3. Build a community of brand advocates through social media

My next tip is to create a social media strategy that's linked with your website. Whether it's Instagram, TikTok, Twitter or Facebook, social media is an easy way to connect with new customers, sell more products and drive business growth through website traffic.

Where I think social media really shines is in the power to create an online community of customers who are passionate about sharing your story. A platform that's particularly great for this is Instagram, as you can use features such as Instagram Stories and Instagram Live to encourage people to share content that's related to your business.

This user-generated content can be seen and shared by people who may have never heard of your brand and help to build more awareness. It's because of this type of content that social media is such a great tool to use to reach more people organically.

If you're looking to make a quick return from your online business, then you may also wish to consider running some paid social media ads, which will use specific demographics to target adverts at your audience.

4. Video marketing makes a difference

As part of the wider strategy for moving your business online, you'll want to invest in video marketing. This is because video is arguably the fastest-growing content medium in the world, with 54% of consumers wanting to see more video content produced by brands.

Video is an invaluable tool for increasing customer engagement across multiple platforms and providing more context about products and services.

I recommend experimenting with short form and long form video content to truly get the most value. This could involve creating 30 – 60 second videos that are displayed on product pages to give customers a deeper understanding of your goods, or used purely for engagement purposes on Instagram Reels and TikTok.

You could also consider starting a YouTube channel and create long-form videos, which dive deep into your brand story. This will have the benefit of building a stronger connection with your audience and going into detail about your products and services.

5.Create an engaging blog to build your authority as a thought leader

My final tip is to create a blog section for your website, where you can craft high-quality articles that are relevant to your industry.

Blogging is an integral part of any content marketing strategy and for building brand awareness. In fact, 60% of consumers feel that blogs provide useful information for them early in the buying journey and help them make an informed purchasing decision.

Here's a quick check list of what you should consider when developing a blog:

- Have an engaging title that grabs the attention of the reader.
- Clearly separate blocks of text with H1 and H2 tags for better Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).
- Include short and long-tail keywords in the text to improve the chances of a blog being found in search engines.
- Use high-quality images and feature alt text as part of your SEO strategy.
- Feature a clear call to action at the end of the blog.

Closing thoughts

There are many benefits to moving your business online, which range from increased brand awareness to future proofing your business sales channels. By following these steps, you'll be in a better position to move your company online and continue to adapt to the needs of your customers.

Author Bio:

Claire Daniels is the CEO of Trio Media, a fully integrated digital marketing agency and Google Premier Partner in Leeds. Claire was voted as Most Influential CEO of the Year in Leeds in 2021 and also spends her time co-hosting two podcasts, The North Star Podcast and Bobble Pod. https://trio-media.co.uk/

How you can spend just 5 minutes a day to turn stagnation into success!

According to the latest science, the average UK adult makes around 35,000 decisions per day!

That's potentially 35,000 times per day where we're creating a ripple of consequence throughout our lives. In binary terms, that ripple will be doing one of two things, it will either be helping us create the life we want or hindering us from it.

If we were to think about those 35,000 decisions consciously, we'd be living in a constant state of overwhelm and paralysis; to prevent this, our brains have developed a subconscious decision making system that essentially decides and drives the majority of our decision making process without us even knowing.

Modern life has hacked this system, it has gone from protecting us impeding us. We're subconsciously sleepwalking through life and according to Dr Mark Williamson, 'when running on auto pilot, we often make unhelpful choices, so we feel trapped and life we're living someone else's life'.

Do you feel like you're living someone else's life? So, how do you stop sleeping walking through life, how do you disengaging auto pilot, how do you get consciously conscious?

The answer is a surprisingly simple one, it's one that's been around for thousands of years and practised by the wisest and wealthiest, from the ancient Stoic philosophers all the way through to sporting superstars like Michael Jordan and billionaires like Bill Gates.

It's self-refection. Self-reflection is the key to self-awareness; simply put it's about taking the time to think about, evaluate and to give serious thought to our attitudes, thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Self-refection allows us to analyse our lives from both a macro and micro level.

At the macro level you can assess the overall trajectory of your life. You can almost do a pre-mortem on where you're heading and determine, in advance whether you're happy with the direction.

At a micro level, you can evaluate specific your responses to particular circumstances and events. You can peel back the layers of your own psychology, you can learn the things that trigger you and gain a wiser perspective about who you are and how you're living your life.

John Dewey said, we do not learn from the experience, we learn from reflecting on the experience and Baltasar Gracain said self-refection is the school of wisdom.

This is why self-reflection really is the key to learning about and progressing ourselves; it gives us the capacity to replicate our wins and avoid repeating our indifferent experiences.
Ray Dalio, American billionaire, chief investment officer of the world's largest hedge fund, Bridgewater Associates and author of one of my all time favourite books, Principles has formulated an equation that can help us reflect and progress. The equation is Pain + Reflection = Progress. Let's unpack that.

Everything has a purpose, even pain and if we choose to let them, the challenges that test us and create our pains can strengthen us. Modern pains might include the complexities of pandemic, work-life balance or a lack of it, workload or even burnout, relationship difficulties or divorce, job dissatisfaction or loss.

All of these, and any others pains you experience can, if you consciously choose to go toward the pain rather than avoid it can provide rich and valuable reflections for us. These reflections, if viewed impartially and unbiasedly can enabled us to progress our careers, deepen the love in our relationships and improve our wellbeing and health.

Self-refection is an essential skill for personal growth, career success and life fulfilment. From the Stoics to the rich and famous, the wisest and wealthiest are at it so why wouldn't you? To help you practise and become proficient at the skill of self-refection, here are 5 daily questions you can ask yourself.

Note, there's no right or wrong time to reflect, most commonly though people reflect in the morning or in the evening.

What is important though is that you don't try to analyse or judge your answers. Just ask yourself and answer the questions either in your mind or by writing down your answers; writing down is particular useful as it enables you identify patterns of thought or behaviour which again can promote as Dalio says, progress.

Question 1 Something I realised or learned today was:
Question 2 The thing I found most challenging today was:
Question 3 Something I am proud of today was:
Question 4 To make tomorrow better than today, I will:
Question 5 My message to myself for tomorrow is:

In summary, using these questions as prompts for self-reflection can enable you to get off auto pilot and stop sleep walking through life. They can and will bring a higher degree of consciousness to your daily life choices and ultimately help you live the life you want.

Your present and future is built upon the foundations of your past; letting your past go 'unchecked' is mistake men can't afford to make. Will you spend 5 minutes of your day looking at yourself instead of looking at your emails and through social media scrolling?

Author:

Performance Coach & Founder of BetterMen, Dan Stanley.
https://www.better-men.uk/

6 ways leaders can create a happier workplace

The global pandemic put a pause on the movements of many workers, who decided it was better to 'sit tight' as the world's businesses drew down the shutters and waited for better times. Now, as the economy begins to recover, 'The Great Resignation' has now begun, which estimates that around 41% of people plan to leave their jobs this year.

A selection of experts provide their tips for leaders and managers looking to retain their workforce by facilitating a happier working environment.

Adequately train your senior managers

Recent research by The Bute Group revealed that 81% of those surveyed would not re-employ their manager. What's more 79% of senior managers would rather employ a new team of their choice than re-employ their direct reports. What this essentially means is that employees are not happy with their managers and managers are equally unhappy with their teams. So what is the issue?

"It's definitely more than just bad management, however bad management plays an immense part in this," explains Margo Manning, a leadership and management consultant, and author of 'The Step-Up Mindset for Senior Managers'.

"From empirical observations, it is clear that managers and leaders can turn a happy, confident individual into a stressed, underperforming and lacking individual. An inexperienced manager will always look to blame external sources for issues around motivation and productivity, and that external source is often the team. Organisations have a responsibility to adequately train and guide their senior managers so that they can nurture happy, harmonious and productive teams. This, in turn, will lead to happier, harmonious and productive teams, as well as improved retention," explains Margo.

Be supportive and empathetic

People often act differently at work when they feel out of their depth or exposed in some way, suggests Elisa Nardi, a former Chief People Officer and founder of career development company Notebook Mentor.

"Rather than criticizing or triggering a defensive response, talk to people about what learning, support, or development might boost their confidence. Supporting people's professional development is a great way to engage and motivate, helping them see a better future," she explains.

"But most of all, be kind. Some days, people may be difficult because they are simply exhausted or feeling at odds with the world. Perhaps they had a row at home before leaving for work? Maybe they bumped their car on the way into the office? For whatever reason, sometimes you can't reason with someone when they are just having a bad day. If it's a recurring problem, then act as suggested above. When it's the occasional one-off, take a deep breath and be kind. After all, one day it might be you feeling the same way," says Elisa.
Communicate a clear purpose beyond profit

One of the most notable impacts of the pandemic in the business world has been to expose those businesses who have covered their brand in a fancy purpose wrapper, but have not taken the time to really consider how to organise around a core purpose and deliver more than paper-thin promises to society, and those who work for them, explains Neil Gaught, a strategy advisor and founder of sustainability champion, Single Organizing Idea.

"It's helped people to identify those businesses that are truly committed to improving society and the world around them, and identify roles in which they will be able to make the most impact," he says.

Neil explains that businesses which are organised around their core purpose will have no trouble keeping their workforce engaged, happy and productive, as long as they communicate their intentions internally and actively involve their staff in their pursuit of a sustainable future.

"This is particularly the case for younger workers, because this generation is not motivated by money or pretence, as survey after survey shows. They want to be heavily invested in the cause. They want their work to be meaningful. They will seek out roles where they are rewarded and recognised for their contributions and will be driven by the impact they are making both individually, and collectively," explains Neil.

Help employees to act on unexplored passions outside of the workplace

It may seem counterintuitive to support employees in cultivating their own projects and side hustles, but management consultant and founder of In•Side•Edge Christy Kulasingam believes that this can go a long way to creating a happy workplace and retaining high performing talent.

"It is clear that the pandemic gave people more space than ever before to really consider what makes them happy, their work-life balance and what their next move might be. Even those who love their colleagues and job were left feeling unfulfilled and despondent." says Christy.

"Empowering employees with the skills, resources and confidence to explore their passions and side hustles will not only create fulfilled employees, who will in turn be happier and more productive because you clearly care about their overall wellbeing, but will give you additional skills to tap into during your next phase of business growth."

Christy suggests initially working with a representative sample of employees on a co-designed entrepreneurship program to see how this could look in your organisation.

Embed authentic wellbeing strategies - not just flashy perks

“Employee wellbeing has rightly featured highly on the agenda for organisations over the past year and this is something that certainly needs to continue as we navigate the post-covid workplace.” comments Karen Meager and John McLachlan, organisational psychologists and co-founder of Monkey Puzzle Training and Consultancy.

However, they are keen to remind leaders that employee wellbeing isn’t synonymous with sleep pods, pool tables and gym memberships.

“We have often seen organisations introduce these flashy perks with great intentions of enriching the employee experience, when really they are celebrating ‘busyness’ and encouraging people to work long hours without breaks. Without addressing these fundamental cultural issues, leaders will find it much more difficult to create an authentically happy workplace.”

Karen and John recommend that senior leaders seek honest feedback from their teams on the entire workplace culture and have transparent conversations with line managers about how their unhealthy behaviours could be trickling down. Additional benefits can certainly supplement our working lives, but they are not a substitute to an authentic wellbeing strategy.

Don’t neglect celebrations of successes and unique differences

For many over the past year in particular, focus has been on business survival and just getting through the days, weeks and months. But as we emerge and look to the future, belonging and celebrations of unique differences need to be central, argues Teresa Boughey, founder of Inclusion 247.

“Now is a prime time to accelerate your inclusion journeys and this will be especially important within hybrid organisations. So often we keep focused on the next thing, but inclusive organisations will always make time to celebrate the successes of individuals, recognising and valuing their unique differences. This will have a considerable impact upon happiness levels and motivate team members for the next sprint”

Teresa suggests this could be achieved through Friday huddles that are dedicated to the successes from the week, but also monthly equivalents to take a longer term view and regular one-to-ones to demonstrate you are committed to their growth. This should involve all stakeholders; employees in the office, remote and freelancers/contractors.

Negative leadership styles to avoid - and how to find yours

Leaders are in a powerful position to influence — how they behave can inspire, motivate and innovate (or, the reverse). Being a leader is no easy task, but there are negative leadership styles that are ineffective at best and damaging at worst, which need to be avoided.

A leadership style is the behaviour a leader displays when they manage people. There are many different leadership styles which allow you to work in a way which is best suited to your personality. It provides you with the knowledge and awareness you need to get the most out of your team and bring success to the organisation you work for.

In this article, Tony Gregg, Chief Executive at Executive Search firm, Anthony Gregg Partnership, reflects on how negative leadership styles can leave your team feeling unmotivated. Tony also emphasises the importance of adopting a leadership style that is well received by your team, matching the candidate's leadership style to the right team.

Extreme micromanagement

Leaders micromanage their team members for a variety of reasons, including fear of loss of control and failure, belief that the team is unskilled and managerial inexperience. In fact, it often comes down to the leader's own insecurities. It is vital that a leader has the self-awareness to change, because micromanagement is damaging for business and leads to a stressful working environment.
As a result:

- Staff are made to feel incapable
- Staff feel not trusted to do the job they are hired to do
- Productivity and innovation are decreased (fostering mediocrity)
- Morale is lower
- There is a higher staff turnover

Likewise, micromanaging will also negatively impact you as a leader:

- Distracting you from your own duties
- Increasing stress, working longer hours; but without the output you need
- Harming your efforts to progress your career

Arrogance

The greatest leaders know that their way of doing things is not necessarily the best. They are self-aware, realising their own flaws and admitting when they do not have the expertise. They have no desire to be right all the time or profess to know it all. They employ people with different skill sets and approaches so that they can work together for the best possible result.

On the other hand, an arrogant leader is narrow-minded and refuses to take advice from someone who is in a junior position to them. A leader who thinks like this will be missing out on talent and experience which will enrich the business.

If you recognise this in yourself, understand that you need others to achieve optimum results. Focus on the positive result and not how your staff members got there. Admit when a colleague has more knowledge than you on a certain topic and let them take the lead.

Poor organisation

A leader who is poorly organised will be less efficient and less effective in their role. Bad organisation can mean that you miss deadlines, confuse dates, miss meetings and generally become unreliable. Your staff will not respect a disorganised leader and will become resentful if they are having to deal with the consequences. This can result in decreased productivity as staff lack the motivation to work for someone whose poor organisation reflects a seeming absence of care.

You can ensure that you are organised by knowing your team's strengths, weaknesses and delegating effectively. You can also create open channels of communication so that you know what is happening at all times and can identify any potential issues. Finally, set goals and maintain efficiency by regularly reviewing processes.

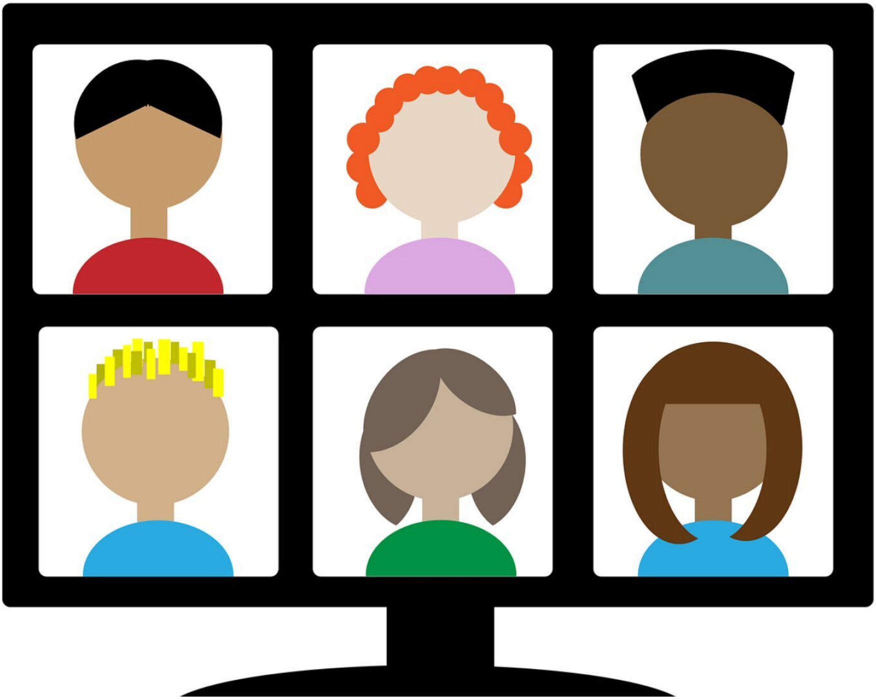
As a successful leader, you must identify your priorities and remain resolute and fixed on your goals. You need to instil routine and structure. A lack of focus and failure to pay attention to detail will let your team down and you will appear apathetic, or even lazy. You need to maintain concentration on the task at hand despite other distractions demanding your attention. Fortunately, self-discipline is an acquired skill — it takes practice.

Closed-minded and inflexible

Closed-minded people don't ask questions — they are more concerned with being right than with getting the best results. They don't want to hear others' ideas and theories. They can become quick to anger when challenged. This can hinder success as the leader will miss opportunities for innovation, growth and development. In fact, it is possible to adopt a collaborative leadership style — where you are still respected as the decision maker. You can avoid being a closed-minded and inflexible leader by asking others for their opinions, advice and feedback. You can make the most of learning opportunities by questioning and asking for help.

Unpredictable

A team needs autonomy to be able to work happily, but to avoid micromanagement they also need to understand what you want. They need to feel like they can come to you with



any problem or query and that your reaction will be positive. An unpredictable manager will react to bad news differently, depending on their mood that day, which can lead to staff avoiding communication and being confused by mixed signals. You can prevent this by ensuring strong lines of communication, with regular check-ins.

Absent and unapproachable

It is important to be present and approachable as a leader because people will feel comfortable enough to bring any issues to you. You will also gain their trust — the bedrock of a high-performing team. An open door policy encourages faster communication and transparency, leading to increased productivity and efficiency. Without this policy, issues can get worse and staff can feel disgruntled. Leaders need to be spending a set part of each day supporting their staff, with regular one-to-one meetings and reviews.

How to find your leadership style?

To find your leadership style, you need to consider how you behave when you are in charge of a team. You might realise that you change when you respond to different situations and you might recognise a variety of different leadership styles — some positive, some negative. The more self-analysis and introspection you can do, the easier it will be to identify ways in which you can improve.

To begin with, ask yourself the following questions:

Do you like to take charge and command? You might be an authoritative leader.
Do you elevate your employees to greater success? This is common for a pace-setting leader.
Do you find delegating easy, trusting your employees to reach their own goals? This is a laissez-faire approach.
Do you get the most out of your team by recognising their strengths and weaknesses? You could be an affiliative leader.
Do you value democracy, motivating all your team members to participate so that each person has a say? This is what a participative leader does.
Do you influence and inspire change in your work environment? This is common in transformational leadership.

Finding an effective leadership style while avoiding toxic leadership traits is a powerful tool in unlocking potential — yours and your team's. This is particularly true for companies going through uncertainty in today's rapidly changing business climate, where your leadership style needs to stay agile.

https://www.anthonygregg.com/

5 Quick tips to redu “The Perfecti

We are not born perfect (Even though our parents may think so). And there is very little evidence to show that we are born as a Perfectionist. Perfectionism is something we learn through our environment, and there can be many reasons including positive reinforcement, praise, high expectations or critical evaluations from our parents. It affects the way we view ourselves, others and the world. Perfectionists have had experiences that lead them to develop a view of the world that encourages the pursuit of unrelenting high standards.

If you find yourself under constant stress to reach the high standards that you put upon yourself, or believe that others expect of you, then you might just be at a point where “Perfectionism” is no longer serving you, but making your life and of those around you miserable.

Pursuing unrealistic standards can have a significant impact on your well-being, leading to frustration, worry, social isolation, depression and a persistent sense of failure.

But things don’t have to stay this way!

Here are 5 tips to reduce the stress and anxiety, caused by Perfectionist thinking:

1 - Be aware, be very aware of your negative thoughts when you make a mistake, and question if those thoughts are rational. ie. there may be one spelling mistake in a report you spent hours on, but the rest is spotless.

2 - Would you speak to your best friend the way you speak to yourself? Would you call them “useless” or “failure?”. Be your own best friend for a change.

3 - What is the worst thing that can happen? Keep asking yourself, is that really the worst thing that can happen?

4 - Is what you think others think of you really their thoughts, or yours? Do you have hard evidence that this is what they are thinking?

5 - Check your values; family, work, health, marriage/ relationship, community, religion, friendship etc. Do you live in line with your values, or are you def some important once because of one?

If you feel your perfectionist beliefs are getting in the way and causing you anxiety, it is ok to seek help. It is possible to learn how to take control of your thoughts and feelings, break free from negative patterns, and make profound changes so that you rediscover your confidence and live the life you want.

By Aylin Webb. http://www.mindandmood.co.uk

uce stress caused by onist” thinking

How to follow your life purpose and not get derailed

Do you have a vision of where you want to be and what you want to do but it's just not happening? Are you feeling blocked and frustrated by duty and responsibility? Or maybe you just can't find the way forward?

You may have a clear knowing of what you want to do but you cannot achieve it because life keeps getting in the way. You may feel there is a book you need to write, a cause you want to fight for, like Greta Thunberg's activism for preventing climate change, or you may have an urge to travel and open up your life. Whatever it is, somehow you never quite get to it. So how to do shift the balance and follow your life's purpose without getting derailed?

To connect to your Higher Consciousness

Your plan for this lifetime is stored in your unique spiritual essence which we call The Higher Self. At times of stress or emotional turmoil your focus will be on your troubles and not on your spiritual essence. You may become disconnected or not hear clearly, like using a bad telephone line.

Here are a few tips to help you raise your vibrations and lift your spirit to enable a full and clear connection:

- Immerse yourself in nature. You can also use walks by the sea, in parks or in the countryside, wild swimming, gardening or any activity that suits you as nature holds the high vibration energies that will raise your spirit.
- Listen to or play music or sing
- Dance or practise yoga
- Be creative e.g. cooking, art or craftwork etc.
- Meditate

- Here is a simple ritual I use every day to consciously connect to my Higher Self: Grip your hands together – this symbolises togetherness. Raise them above your head – this symbolises raising your consciousness. Say out loud "I am fully connected now, right now, right now" – this uses your free will and intent to make the connection.

To connect to your heart to find out your heart's desire

You may have a sense of being unsettled, restless and needing change but at a loss to know what it is you want to do. Let's look at how you can find your hidden inner passion.

Write down everything you have ever done, including in your childhood, that you have found exciting, exhilarating and that made you feel happy and complete. There will be clues in that list that may trigger an idea for you to take forward.
Your mind is often guided by logic and fear, so discover what your heart wants. This simple ritual will help you to connect to your heart:
Put your hands together in front of your chest - to represent the doors of your heart
Open them wide three times - to symbolise your intention of opening your heart
Place one hand on your heart centre, in the middle of your chest and focus your attention on your heart centre
Ask your heart what its wish is; the first thought that comes into your mind is the answer.

Your fears can block your progress

You may be blocked from reaching your goal by fear. This can be a conscious or subconscious fear from past experiences or from imagining the worst outcome. How do you overcome fears? I have found the most effective way is to face them! If there is something you really want, then do it anyway, even if you are scared. Facing fears is empowering and will knock down those invisible boundaries that limit you.

You may be following your life purpose by doing exactly what you are doing!

An important aspect of Life Purpose/destiny is that you may well be fulfilling this already!

My belief is that when we are living kind, caring and thoughtful lives that consider the feelings and needs of others – then we are fulfilling our role as spiritual human beings.

The hero in the new musical 'Artaban', which premiered in Covent Garden in November is based on the book 'The Fourth Wise Man' by Henry van Dyke, faces similar challenges on his life journey.

Artaban spent years waiting for the star that was prophesied to show the arrival of a new king. A new king that would help lead people from the corrupt and greed of life at that time. Once he saw the star, he was desperate to meet his three fellow Zoroastrian priests to follow the star to Bethlehem. There he would give his gifts, of a ruby, a sapphire and a pearl, to the baby Jesus. But Artaban's quest and heart's desire was thwarted right from the start as he was approached by a sick man at the side of the road. Artaban was not only a philosopher and astronomer but also a healer and his compassion pulled him to stop and help the man recover. This meant he missed the other three magi and consequently by the time he reached Bethlehem the family had moved on to Egypt.

Artaban spent the next thirty years of his life searching for Jesus and constantly stopping to help those in need. Because he felt he was failing in his mission he felt guilty and a failure (is that familiar to you?) However, eventually he came to Jerusalem where he heard that Jesus was imprisoned awaiting crucifixion. Once again, his urge to help him and give him his last remaining gemstone was thwarted. But, he did learn the most important lesson of all, that in truth he had fulfilled his mission – which was to help others. His acts of kindness on

the way to his goal were the reality of his mission on earth.

So as the saying goes, its not the goal but the journey and how you live your life day-to-day that really matters. So, relax about discovering a momentous life purpose, but follow your heart – it won't fail you. And concentrate on living each day with love and kindness for that is what your heart truly needs and the love and gratitude that returns to you will give you fulfilment and happiness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Jones is a spiritual healer, author of seven books translated into 18 languages, and co-creator of 'Artaban The Musical' which is based on the book 'The Fourth Wise Man' by Henry van Dyke. https://artabanthemusical.co.uk/

Workaholism – The respectable addiction

Churchill said, men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened…

What might have started out as an intrinsic enthusiasm to progress a career, to climb the corporate ladder or to build a business can often end up with a person developing perfectionist and obsessional traits. If these traits become habitual then choosing work over other aspects of life can soon turn into a compulsion to work.

For those men that progress from a habitual to a compulsive demeanour, they can often find that their continued weighting of work creates significant challenges in their lives, particularly when married and with children. Workaholism is seemingly most prevalent in Type A's; those men that are hype competitive and obsessively outcome oriented – the same men that undoubtedly go on excel in their corporate companies or build hugely successful businesses.

Workaholics can forget work – life balance as most of their time, they're experiencing work – life conflict.

Let's get clear, workaholism is defined as a 'compulsive desire to work' and a definition of an addiction is 'compulsive engagement despite adverse consequences'. The word that stands out, that links these definitions and that can be used to assess your attitude toward work is 'compulsion'. If you have a compulsion, a consistent urge to work then it's likely that you have progressed from having a passion for your profession to becoming a workaholic.

The term came into existence in 1971 in the book 'The Confessions of a Workaholic'. A time when many of our fathers would have been in the 'thrusting' stage of their careers and since then has gone on to become a somewhat socially and maritally respectable and acceptable addiction.

According to the findings of recent survey that covered 2,000 employees across the UK (commissioned by SPANA), it found that 57 % of those surveyed checked their emails during the weekend, that 40 % feel they cannot switch off after work and that 20% checked their emails whilst in bed. A sign of our wider attitude to work is when we ask someone 'how are you?' and they reply curtly with 'busy!'

Our ease of accessing work through our devices and super-fast broadband means that for many, 'busyness' has become a badge of honour and in many company cultures, being first in and last out of the office and firing emails at obscure times have become the subconscious metrics that determine whether or not someone is a 'hard worker'.

As a society, I cannot help but feel we're underestimating the seriousness and impact of workaholism in a socioeconomic sense. Progressing the conversation around workaholism is an objective manner is a study the Bergan University (Norway). The study attempted to pin down exactly what lead people to developing a compulsive attitude toward work. The research team studied over 1,100 people and developed the Bergan Work Addiction Scale (BWAS). The BWAS is diagnostic test to assess attitudes toward work and consists of 7 yes or no questions:

1.Do you think about how you can free up more time to work
2.Do you spend much more time working than initially intended
3.Do you work in order to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness
4.Have you been told by others to cut down on work but you don't listen
5.Do you become stressed if you are prohibited from working
6.Do you de-prioritise hobbies, leisure activities or exercise because of work
7.Have you worked so much that it has negatively impacted your health

I believe the BWAS is a useful sense check, however, I also acknowledge that at times it may be necessary to prioritise work; the key differentiator between having a passion for your work and being a workaholic is seemingly found in the word compulsion.

Steven Bartlett, millionaire millennial, the founder of Social Chain and host of the highly acclaimed, The Dairy of a CEO podcast talks regularly about his 'compulsion' to over index work and the adverse impact of this is his life, particularly in terms of his health and in his closest and intimate relationships. As a gender, Steven included, it appears many modern day professional men have/are aligning their identities to what they do and go on to derive their self-worth from how well they do it.

Who are you without your career?

If your business was taken from you, who would you be…
Take a moment to ponder these perhaps uncomfortable questions…

Over the past few years, I've worked with a number of clients that would have never considered themselves to be workaholics, instead they've viewed their approach toward work as demonstrating their drive and desire, to be their best and provide for their families.

But for many of these men, the outcome of their actions, and their tendency to over index work is always the same, they come to me: Lacking balance, experiencing unhealthy levels of stress, their wellbeing has declined and their relationships and become distant.

Maybe the alarm bells are ringing for you, maybe you have never considered yourself a workaholic, but if you feel slightly uncomfortable reading this, may be there's some inconvenient truths to be faced.

It's trite but true, if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.
The more we converse and normalise the conversations around the difficulties modern men experience, the more we, collectively, can reduce the stigma many men feel around asking for help or admitting they have an issue with something.

By Dan Stanley, Founder of https://www.better-men.uk/

Why financial transparency will unlock your business growth

Open and honest communication engenders a transparent business culture which in turn builds trust, enhances clarity and inspires loyalty. To be truly successful, this transparency should lie at the heart of everything you do: the way you set up processes, talk with your teams and deal with suppliers. But most importantly, you should be transparent in the way you communicate your financial positioning, report to your stakeholders, share your data as well as communicate your mistakes and your successes. Transparency will unite a team in such a way, you will be stronger together in some of your weakest times and ready to celebrate your strengths with unity.

What is financial transparency?

Financial transparency is where you share financial information with employees, investors and stakeholders. A lot of businesses are so clandestine when it comes to money whether that be profits, debts or salaries. However, if everyone – particularly employees – understood the company finances or decisions directors take that impact the financial health of the business, then they would be empowered to think like business owners. This is likely to engender a collaborative leadership approach, particularly in smaller businesses, and as a result it will unlock growth. After all, many minds are better than one.

The corporate condition

In today's world, global reporting systems for corporates are designed to provide a level of privacy for businesses; it ensures a relatively balanced playing field in terms of minimum requirements of published financial and non-financial data.

Corporates have, to a certain degree, a high level of control over what they want the world to see. And when we say 'world', we're talking primarily about analysts; financial analysts, investment analysts, pension fund managers and interested parties who are ultimately looking to hand over cash to these corporates by way of debt or equity investment.

On the whole, the system works but it's not perfect as is anything which involves human beings.

But:

- What if the system changed as did the way we value information?
- What if access to more information was valued greater than increasing profit margins?

It sounds wonderful – in fact, as a consumer, wouldn't you like to work with a business like that? That sort of company is attractive, not just for the customer, but for potential employees, suppliers and investors too.

A business that values honesty, transparency and integrity above profit is the type of business that will effect change and make a positive impact.
The benefits of financial transparency

1. Efficient teamwork

Restricting access to information, can create doubt or worry. It can cause employees to become distracted and therefore reduce productivity. However, if a team is privy to financial forecasts, figures and resources and understand how those numbers are obtained they are more likely to be able to work in a streamlined way towards the same end goal, happy the business is healthy (and will remain that way) if everyone continues to work together.

2. Attracts investment

When anyone is looking to invest in your business, they are going to approach the task with a healthy dose of scepticism. They are going to want to go through your financials with a fine toothcomb as part of their due diligence. It will be obvious if you are withholding information so being fully transparent really does engender confidence. Even if you feel such transparency doesn't show your business in its best light, your honesty will be refreshing. Financials can be improved, and your integrity is more likely to open the door to investment than inflated financial reports ever would.

3. Builds credibility

It won't be long before corporate companies are ranked in terms of transparency and integrity instead of their profitability. Transparent businesses are credible: they will set realistic targets based and a lot less likely to commit financial reporting fraud. This level of credibility will make business highly attractive to work for and as a result, business will attract and retain global talent.

The future of financial transparency

The invention of Bitcoin started a revolution of decentralisation and integrity. Created in response to the 2008 financial crisis, Bitcoin uses an emerging technology called blockchain, which creates timestamps to ensure data cannot be tampered with. Prior to the 2008, there was a lot of tampering with financial information which led to the crash itself – all because companies wanted to appear better than they were: success by deception.

Integrity, transparency and honesty are built into blockchain transactions by design. Theoretically, no single person, organisation, or government, has control over the information held within a blockchain.

So, what if blockchain becomes the platform for reporting financial information in the future? What if blockchain technology becomes the new basis for financial reporting and data is available in real-time and available to all?

How to be more financially transparent to unlock your business growth today

With blockchain technology still in its infancy, there are still ways you can be transparent with your financials without it. This means you can still lead the revolution in transparency, allowing you to unlock your business growth. That's because transparency is set to give businesses a competitive advantage in a very short space of time; how transparent you are, will form a significant part of your corporate marketing strategy.

You don't want to be seen as withholding information when all of your competitors are freely flaunting it. You must also think about who people are going to want to buy from, work with or give credit to.

So, here is how you can be more financially transparent without having to wait for technology to make it easier – or even mandatory.

1. Own your data

You need to be 100% responsible for your data and being responsible begins with looking at it, checking it, knowing what you have and understanding what you're missing which his best achieved through a Data Gap Analysis.

It can be argued that CEOs, COOs and CFOs do this on a regular basis: it's their job to know the financial and non-financial statistics inside out but how often is it really put to the test? Once a quarter if they're a publicly traded company? Once a year if they're privately owned?

The C-Suite needs comfort that data is being captured accurately and timely. They need to know employees are fully aligned with the values and the mission and that financial data is being harnessed in the most efficient manner and being used to its fullest potential.

2. Be clear with your presentation

It sounds obvious but messy spreadsheets aren't going to cut it in business. If something is presented in a convoluted manner, it could appear you don't fully understand it either. If it's not clear, then people will find it difficult to trust whatever it is you are trying to show them.

If you are clear with the way you input your data, then you will get clear data back that is easy to share. If employees and other members of the team are able to understand and share the information this again engenders trust and elevates efficiency in all areas of the business from sales to marketing.

3. Make it a team effort

By being clear with your presentation, you are inviting team members to both analyse and review the financials. Finances are not exclusively for one department. In fact, you should be allowing the person doing the bookkeeping to see more than just the Profit and Loss report or the marketing team to see how much revenue their campaigns brought in to the business. People want to know where they fit in to the larger picture and when they do, they are more likely to generate ideas that could improve efficiency, sales or savings. They will go beyond what is expected of them rather than doing simply what they have to, so they've ticked a box. By involving the team, it creates a sense of empathy throughout the business rather than any 'issues' that arise simply being someone else's problem.

4. Clear communication strategies

Another way to ensure you create a team effort is to establish clear communication strategies. If you are small business, you can set up weekly or monthly briefings to encourage open and honest communication among your team. If you are a larger company, you could appoint your heads of department to hold these meetings on your behalf or send out company newsletters or reports that communicate the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Hidden control isn't always a conscious decision, so by making sure these systems are in place, you will avoid any unintentional suppression of information.

Financial transparency is about so much more than fundamentals, risk factors, price levels and profit; it's about the human desire to trust, belong and contribute. By opening your business finances to more than the 'select few', you will access benefits, insights and potentially ideas you would never have otherwise as well as outside investment.

As with any revolution, all it takes are one or two pioneers to challenge and change perceptions. While it won't happen overnight, it will happen and with social media and technology on its side, it could happen relatively quickly. Establishing process to enhance financial transparency today could set you in good stead to be the leader of tomorrow and truly unlock your business growth.

Philippa Scobie is a leading expert at leveraging a company's assets in terms of time and people, to reduce financial waste, grow exponentially and establish a world-class company culture that attracts global talent. Empowering businesses with the financial systems and processes to boost growth and productivity, she has worked closely with numerous fintech start-ups and hypergrowth companies, quickly transforming them from founder-managed ventures to multidimensional organisations with 7-figure+ turnovers.

She lives in Bedford, UK, with her husband and two young sons and is a firm believer that happiness is a journey, not a destination. The very act of striving to achieve great things is where the real fun, growth and reward lie rather than simply in the results.

Web: www.financialmomentum.co.uk

How to break into a new market with a product-based business

E-commerce is thriving. Online sales exceeded $4.2 trillion dollars worldwide in 2020 with over 2 billion people having purchased goods. In the year of the pandemic, worldwide e-commerce retail sales grew by 25 percent. New online buyer's habits have been formed and they're here to stay so this makes the future for product-based businesses very exciting to say the least.

However, launching a product into a new market can be tricky. With so many decisions to make along the way, often startups can feel overwhelmed, and most fail within the first three years because they do not do the necessary research about the actual product in the first place.

There is no point to starting a business only to find out no one wants to buy your product. This can be the most challenging part of the process if you have no idea of what to sell. Be prepared to spend a decent amount of time researching. Your product should solve a problem and add value to your customers.

Ultimately, you want your product to fly off the shelves, not being able to keep up with the demands of your ideal customers. This is what we call 'product-market fit'. Achieving product-market fit is one of the most important goals for a start-up, yet it is also one of the least understood concepts.
To help, here are 10 steps to help get your product to market:

1. Determine your Ideal Customer

Ideal customers ultimately decide how well a product meets their needs and whether it adds value. Use customer personas to dig deep into the demographics as well as the psychographics (activities, interests, and opinions) to segment the new market of potential customers with similar needs and behaviour.

Start with a high-level hypothesis of your ideal customer and continue to revise as you learn more about them. Identify their underserved needs that are not adequately met and refine and tweak the features of your product to improve it and add more value.

With this deep understanding of your ideal customers, when it comes to marketing to them you will know where to find them and use the correct marketing messaging that resonates with them.

2. Define your Unique Selling Proposition

Competition is inevitable, especially for ecommerce. What makes your product different and better than the competition? The unique selling proposition sets your product aside from the competition.

Choose which customer problems your product can solve and then figure out which unique features of your product will delight your ideal customers and how your product will outperform your competitors. You are not looking to be an inventor of a product, but rather to tweak an existing product, or a different way of delivering that product or customer experience.

3. Specify your minimum viable product feature set

Once you have defined your unique selling proposition, you will need to specify your minimum viable product feature set. Work out what functionality or design your minimum viable product will include.

The aim is to build only what is needed, creating enough value for your ideal customer to validate your product and ensure it's heading in the right direction. From here you will tweak and iterate until you have the minimum viable product that customers agree is viable and adds value.

4. Create and validate your minimum viable product prototype

Before spending thousands on creating your product, create a prototype of the minimum viable product. Show your ideal customers this version and ask for feedback. If they can touch and feel the product, even better. Ask them a series of questions to get as much feedback from them as possible.

Carefully observe what the ideal customer says and does while using the prototype. Ask open-ended questions to gain deeper insights and get the most out of the feedback. Avoid asking closed questions that will only get a yes or no.

Identify common patterns of similar feedback and use this to improve your product.

5. Find a manufacturer and place an order

Most get overwhelmed by this! You want to use a reputable manufacturer. Try and keep the development and first order of your product local if possible. This will keep your costs down and the turnaround will generally be quicker. Not to mention the environmental benefits of staying local.

Sourcing from abroad often means higher minimum quantity orders and can take a couple of months to arrive amongst other logistical issues – and more recently, significant shipping costs. When you are ready for this, ensure you communicate clearly with your potential supplier and always ask for samples.

6. Build your store and choose your sales channels
There are numerous options out there when it comes to choosing a website platform. Research and decide which one suits you and your brand and build your store.

One of the best ways to reach new customers is to choose marketplaces where your ideal customers already shop. These channels have inbuilt audiences, and some customers do most of their shopping only on these channels so don't miss out on potential sales.

Know all the costs involved when selling on these platforms to ensure your profit margin is healthy and with the correct mix of marketplaces together with your own website, this will support and complement your product visibility.

7. Build your audience on social media

If you want a great launch, start building your audience on the relevant social media platforms before your product has even landed. You don't physically need your product to start promoting and intriguing your potential customers.

Take them on a journey with you throughout the process, after all, people buy from people. Build the know, like and trust factor to create front-of-mind positioning so when an ideal customer thinks of your product category, your product is the first that comes to mind. Focus on the platforms where your ideal customers hang out.

8. Build your email waiting list

Conversion rates on email are greater than those on social media and websites. Once your product lands and you launch, you want to be able to get as many eyeballs on your product as possible.

Incentivise your followers on social media to sign up to your email waiting list. This is your greatest asset when it comes to launching.

9. Decide on your marketing strategy

Visibility of your product is paramount! It's a numbers game – you need to understand that sales conversion rates in most product categories are low.

Decide which organic marketing and paid for advertising strategies you are going to use. Be prepared for a little trial and error when testing these out. Always remember to analyse data to see what is working and do more of that.

10. Launch your product
The key to launching your product is to create as much hype before and during your launch. Don't miss out on the opportunity of a well-executed launch. This can bring about a cash injection that can then help scale to the next level.
Ensure your website is working seamlessly, populate the website with great, legitimate reviews, set up your email campaign and launch! And test your website again and again!
Launching a product into a new market is as exciting as it is challenging. The process can be overwhelming at times, but it's so rewarding. Take the leap and enjoy the process. Remember - be consistent.

Author:
Bridgete Combrinck is a product-based entrepreneur with 13 years of experience and a proven track record of success. Now helping other like-minded entrepreneurs start, build and scale ecommerce business.
www.productentrepreurs.com

Preparing Your Business Pre-Launch

Sustainable businesses are on the rise, with the increase of coverage about climate change and innovative ways to reduce our carbon footprint becoming more widely known. But it is evident that some businesses are struggling to keep up and have no clue where to start.

It is important to distinguish the brand's mission before setting out any guidelines for products and services and means you as a business owner will have a fundamental understanding of your business without having to think. Purpose driven, ethical marketing is the way forward.

Messaging and branding is important for the growth of any business, and even more so when it comes to ethical start-ups. Many brands are under scrutiny when their messaging becomes wishy washy and negative media starts overtaking the benefits.

Pre-launch marketing aims to raise awareness and build growth around the brand before the launch of the products or service. It is also a good tactic to understand your audience and to perfect the message, to see what works best for your brand.

Therefore researching and constructing the messaging at the beginning, prior to launch, is the most effective way to start an ethical business. So here are the best steps for preparing your business using Confident Tiger as an example.

Research

Research should be key to starting ANY business, right? It is the process of how we can gather data on the market and our ideal consumers. Without this, how can we position ourselves in the market to compete and become a unique stand-out brand?

Starting with surveys and digital analysis of the market is a great way to start understanding the key problems your ideal clients have and how you can solve them. What are other businesses failing to fix?

Setting up a brand proposition is your next step after researching the ins and outs of the market. This will lay out the groundwork for your brand vision, values and mission, to refer back to at any time and should be at the core of your marketing plan.

It should be a constantly evolving document that you add to and change as your brand changes. Don't feel you have to get everything detailed at this point, but start scoping out your ideas.

Landing Page

One way to showcase your initial mission is by creating your website pre-launch as a place for your audience to land for lead generation. This landing page can simply state what your brand is with a single call-to-action for example sign up, buy now or learn more.

Becoming visible before launching any products, allows consumers to sign up to email marketing, where they can receive brand updates and can opt-in for newsletters. Pre-launch Confident Tiger had an average of 15 sign-ups a day and a total of 1,000 people fully engaged before even having a product offering.

These are the crucial supportive customers, who will follow the journey of your brand through the startup process to launch. It also means that when products are finally launched, there will be immediate engagement as the process has been planned to include market and consumer research.

Social Media

Once you have set up a landing page, social media is the next best way to create and engage with your audience, reflecting your values and mission. Posts should be targeted to your ideal personas, to ensure interaction between you and the audience can flow and enable conversation.

Alongside creating social media profiles, low cost ads on these platforms can drive traffic before you even have products. This sort of traction will enable consumers to engage with your brand and become emotionally invested, captivating as many followers as possible right from the beginning.This is where you can build on the relationship, to educate consumers throughout the process for example, Confident Tiger used social media strategy to pull an audience using educational material and videos. The brand also used this platform to gain valuable data from these followers through a survey 3-6 months before officially launching.

Influencer Marketing

Once you have a prototype of a product or service, you can start contacting nano-influencers, who have a following between 1,000 and 10,000. These influencers generally have high engagement with their followers and they themselves are looking out for opportunities to grow.

Contacting this type of influencer will allow you to increase word-of-mouth marketing for your brand. There are different deals you can do with influencers including sending a free sample or they may have a charge for specific posts/ stories, usually depending on their following and engagement rate.

Confident Tiger collaborated with a few nano-influencers, providing an arrangement to send a measuring tape and a sustainable bra once produced in return for two reels: one with the tape and one with the bra.

The launch

Sufficient market and consumer research will allow for a ready engaging audience to build on once products have been launched. In the build up to your launch, you can constantly update your existing audience by sending emails, keeping them updated with what's happening on social and giving them exclusive behind the scenes insights. This makes your audience feel like part of a secret society and builds loyalty fast – especially if you can get them involved in the product or service development.

In the meantime, you can engage with and create related content on social media and blogs that will increase sign ups and will increase interaction to ensure you have the ability to gain loyal customers from the beginning.

Author:
Clare Martin, Founder, Confident Tiger https://confident-tiger.com/

How to become a sustainable business in 5 steps

Our climate is changing as are our attitudes and the way we purchase. Becoming a sustainable business has a wealth of advantages and is imperative in ensuring your business' future. Incorporating sustainability into your business is vital in protecting our planet and helping in the fight against climate change.

By becoming a green business, you will reduce to reduce the negative impact created by your operations. SMEs account for 99% of the private sector meaning they collectively have the opportunity to pave the way for a greener future. The value created by sustainability in business is multifaceted; becoming a Net Zero business benefits not only the planet but can also help contribute to the success of your business.

With 80% of UK residents concerned about climate change, it is hardly surprising that there is an increasing demand from consumers for businesses to act responsibly and sustainably. Consumers' purchasing patterns show that this looks only to increase in the coming years. As more consumers make decisions based on a brand's eco-credentials, those who have embraced sustainability are set to not just retain their current customers but also attract new ones. Whilst businesses may be tempted to change their operations to grow their reach, they will soon enough find out that by streamlining they will also improve their efficiency saving them time and money. With many SMEs falsely believe the myth that going sustainable will be too costly, the value it brings, both in the short and long term, emphasises that it is worth every penny.

Many businesses recognise the importance of becoming sustainable however due to a lack of resources and knowledge feel overwhelmed with 78% of businesses stating they don't know where to start to become more sustainable. Sustainability shouldn't be complex, it needs to be accessible to everyone, everywhere. You can improve your business sustainability in 5 steps by measuring and managing your emissions, doing behavioural actions and investing in green tech, transitioning to renewable energy, investing in offsetting and participating in projects which give back to the community.

Step 1: Measure and manage your emissions

Understanding your carbon footprint will give you a better idea of the impact your business has on the planet. By knowing your emissions, you can benchmark your business and see how it compares to others in your industry and how you fare against your competitors. Getting to grips with your carbon footprint is essential in pinpointing where you need to make changes within your business to reduce your emissions and will provide a starting point to help you monitor your sustainability progress. Using an online carbon calculator, such as this one Zellar - World's First Sustainability Platform for Business - Carbon calculator , is a useful tool to help you determine your current carbon footprint.

Step 2: Do Behavioural actions and invest in green tech

Making proactive change can be difficult as every business operates differently however using data specific to your business will help you monitor your actions, giving you a greater insight into how you can behave more sustainably. Setting actions which you monitor each month such as checking internal lights are switched off out of hours or the thermostat is scheduled for the right timings, will help you to become a more sustainable business.Once you have done behavioural actions you can then decide where to invest to make changes to increase productivity. Investing in green technology is a sustainable way to run your business. Green tech refers to environmentally-friendly technology which doesn't harm the environment and helps to reduce emissions. Green tech can be anything from smart thermostats to loft insulation, double or triple gazed windows to energy-efficient fridges. Having green tech is a more sustainable option for businesses as it uses less power than other products. Once you've installed these products, make sure you incorporate it into your behavioural actions for example is the equipment fully serviced and maintained? If not, it may not be running as efficiently as possible wasting energy. By being more efficient it helps businesses to save energy, money and reduce their emissions.

Step 3: Transition to renewables

Transitioning to renewable energy helps to lower your business carbon footprint. By using renewable energy sources instead of fossil fuels, your energy consumption doesn't negatively affect the planet. When choosing an energy provider, you need to be aware of greenwashing as many energy companies offer green tariffs however these can still consist of a mix of sources including fossil fuels. Businesses looking to become more sustainable need to address where their energy comes from and how to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions they emit.

Step 4: Offset

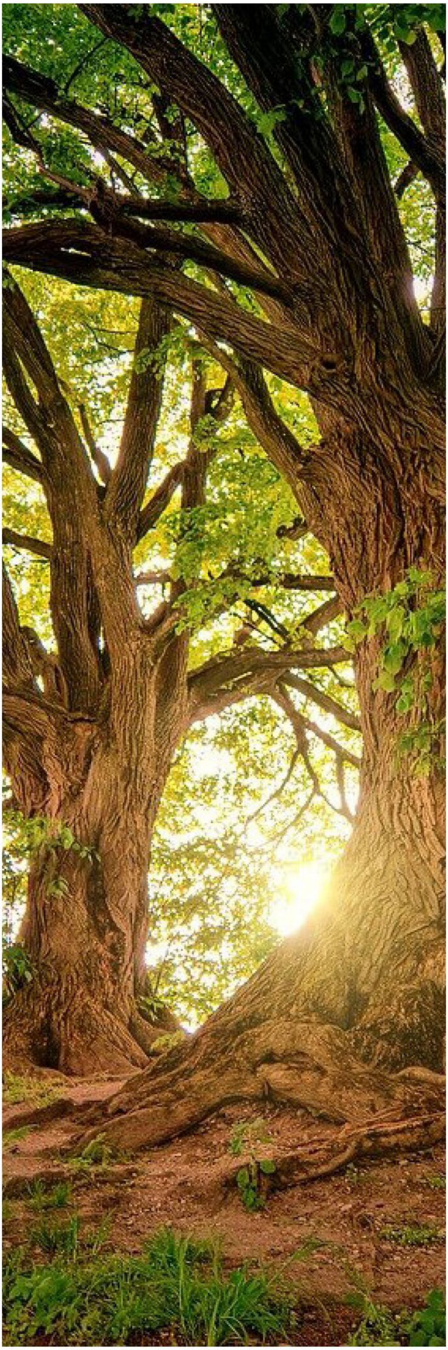
Carbon offsetting allows businesses to invest in climate change solutions, from planting trees to protecting mangrove swamps and restoring peat bogs. When you purchase an offset, you are funding the reduction or removal of carbon emissions. Businesses can only do so much, so fast, within their own operations. Supporting carbon offset projects is therefore a great way to have a bigger impact and demonstrate your commitment to sustainability. Just remember that climate change won't be solved through offsetting alone. Businesses also need to continue making significant internal changes that reduce their emissions.

Step 5: Giving back

Becoming a sustainable business is about understanding the harmony of sustainability in which you give more than you take. This notion should echo through your actions, in having a business you naturally impact the community and environment around you, that's why it's important to make sure that impact is positive. By involving yourself in local biodiversity or volunteering projects you can help give back and contribute to leaving the planet in a better state than you found it. Corporate volunteering is also a great way to entice talent to your business by helping to align your business values with your employees. A study from Deloitte showed that 89% of employees think businesses that support volunteering activities offer a better overall working environment. It's important to share your sustainability progress and how your efforts are contributing to a greener environment. Implementing ESG principles into your business also helps to attract investors to your business. Doing good is good for your employees, your business, your community and your planet – it's a win-win.

Sustainable businesses don't just look to the future, they are the future. With increasing emphasis on the importance of sustainability setting ambitious environmental goals is crucial in not just determining the future planet we leave to our children but also the future of our businesses. Going green requires thought and you can't become a Net Zero business overnight. However, by implementing a sustainability strategy and following the five stated steps you can start your journey to becoming a sustainable business today.

Author:
Elsa Papa of Zellar www.zellar.com



How to overcome fear in your business - 7 tips to stop letting it get in your way

Fear is one the most dominant factors preventing women from either starting a business or experiencing success due to quitting within the first 2 years.

First thing you need to know about fear is that it's your mind simply letting you know that something is unfamiliar to it. It's the 'threat' of the unknown or of you entering unknown space, that's all.

Entrepreneurship is risky, challenging and uncomfortable. No one goes into business with a guarantee of success, so uncertainty is a given.

Therefore, it's a good idea to get more comfortable with feeling fear and get yourself into a habit of continuing to take focused action despite it.

The fears in your way

Fear of failure. This is of course, the first and most obvious one. This tends to top the list of obstacles in the way of women launching a business or causing them to give up.
Fear of success. This is a less obvious one as it's more subconscious, but it's a huge block to achieving success. This is the 'other side' of the unknown. That success you dream of is so new and unfamiliar to your mind with all its previous memorised experiences and 'programming', that it considers this a 'system error' and will alert you to it – in the form of fear.

It's trying to warn you that something doesn't fit with your current 'setting' – and this might show up as doubts around your ability to cope with such success, how it might affect your lifestyle or quality of your relationships, and perhaps most importantly, discomfort around this 'new person' you would have to become as you step into a bigger role in your life, leaving your 'old self' behind who you've identified with for such a long time until now.

Fear of rejection. This is from those you see as your ideal clients or customers, as well as potential business partners. You might doubt they will want to buy from you, invest in you or work with you, and you might feel insecurity around pitches, sales or having money conversations.

Fear of judgment. These 'others' can be not only your potential ideal clients, partners or investors, but also people you know or who are in your circle – whether friends, family, colleagues etc.

You might dread putting yourself or your business out there in the public eye or on social media, feel uncomfortable being seen in your business role by those who know you, or fear how people surrounding you will perceive you if things don't go as planned, especially if they were sceptical of your capability to succeed.

Fear of learning. This one is very often overlooked but it can be detrimental to your business. Running a business is a continuous learning and developing experience. Especially if you are only starting out, there will be many aspects of business, skills and tools you'll need to learn. Even if you're already established, as tech, marketing and the world around us change and evolve, you will need to constantly update and upgrade your knowledge & skills.

Some limiting beliefs that might be driving this kind of fear might tell you that it will be too difficult, take too much effort or time; that it's too late for you; you're too old; you're not good at it or it's just not for you. Fear of change. Social, cultural shifts as well as advancement in tech is constantly changing business landscapes. This is true for both how you present your business to the outside world as well as how you run it on the inside.

What has worked for your business in the past may not work well for you now or into the future. So sticking to what you know, not being willing to let things go and not adapting to change can be very damaging.

So what can you do to overcome or minimise fear?

1.Develop a positive, growth mindset. Building a business isn't an easy ride. You're going to face lots of challenges, you'll have to experiment & take risks. Sometimes you won't get the results you want. You have to accept that as a given. So make a commitment to continue on, no matter what, with grit and an open & curious mind. Identify and clear any beliefs that might be in your way. Top-performers aren't held back by perfectionism and they don't relate to the word 'failure' – only to the ongoing process of learning & development. In fact, many entrepreneurs started out with a business idea that didn't work. But they didn't stop there. They went on to the next, better idea which has brought them success.

2. Remind yourself that fear is a sign of potential for big growth. You're stretching & moving beyond where you are now and what you're familiar with - that's what your mind is signalling to you. In fact, if you're not feeling fear or discomfort at all when setting your goals – it might actually mean you're not aiming high enough. So begin seeing fear as a positive driving force.

3. Remind yourself often of your 'What'. This is what your motivation is, your values, your mission, your dream, and what success will do for you or the world around you. Do this daily. This creates a higher motivation state for your mind, and in order for the mind to go for the unknown despite the risk, it has to be highly motivated.

4. Use affirmations & visualisations regularly. Almost all high-achievers learn to use this success-habit properly. There are many advantages to doing this on a regular basis, but in terms

of fear, what this repetition does is it makes your future vision more familiar to your mind so it no longer perceives them as a threat. Your mind is then able to it more easily as a true outcome and it will allow you to access more positive resources & feelings around it. Your mind will begin to produce 'output' that corresponds to that expected experience.

5.Use the power of language. The words you use literally programme your mind on a subconscious level. Your inner conversation determines the way you experience the outer world. So use language that empowers you.

Here are a couple of simple adjustments that might sound insignificant, but that can make a huge difference:

- Change 'I'm afraid' to 'I feel fear'. The first phrase creates attachment & identification with the fear. It creates a feeling that it's a part of you and therefore that it would be difficult if at all possible to change. But when you tell yourself that you 'feel fear', your mind understands that it's simply an emotion passing through your experience. Like any other emotion, it's destined to shift and move; it's not permanent. So you're far less attached to it, and as a result, it's far easier to let it be and consequently drop it, have it move on its way or take action despite it.

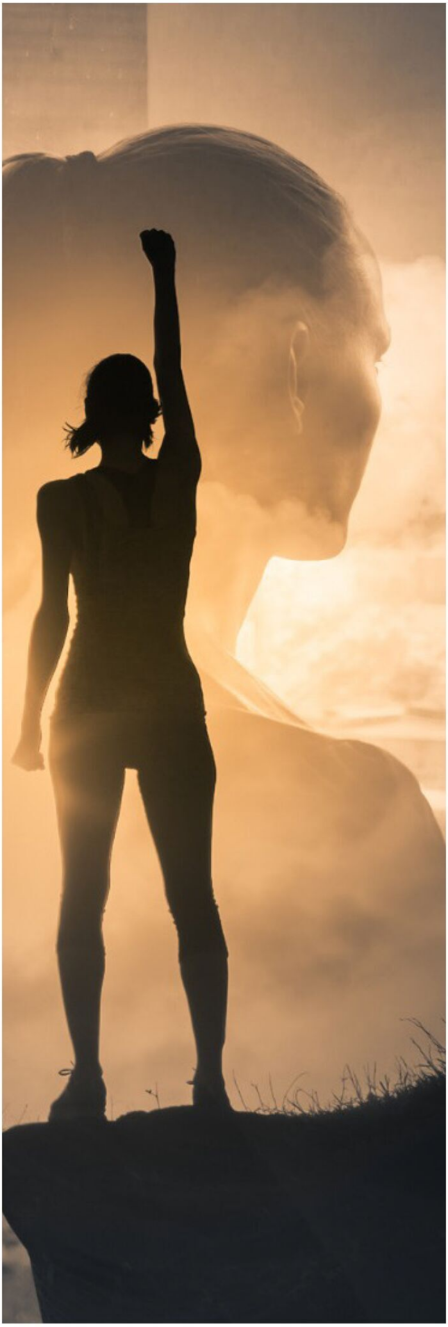
- Reframe the word 'fear'. Some people like to use the word 'excited' instead, but if that feels like too much of a stretch, you can use 'I wonder / I'm curious whether'. For example, instead of saying 'I'm afraid this won't work' you might say 'I wonder / I'm curious how / whether this might work'. Remember that fear is about the unknown. So using these words, you're simply acknowledging this in a neutral and more open way without the associated limitations of fear.

6. Remind yourself it's all in your imagination. In this present moment, whatever you feel fear around is only in your head. You're projecting imaginary scenarios onto the future, usually based on your past. You're focused on worst case scenarios.
The truth is most of your fears will never come true (when taking constructive action despite it). But you tend to create a very imbalanced view of future possibilities, which are truly endless and can go either way. So instead of only imagining the worst outcome (which you can still allow yourself to do), use your imagination to explore the best case scenario too. This will balance both of these two possibilities in your mind. It'll help to neutralise the fear and give you a far more 'objective' perspective around the potential experience.

Over time, doing this repeatedly, this more neutral feeling will become your mind's habit pattern, you'll be far less affected by future uncertainties and you'll also get more control over your thinking in other areas too.

7. Get support. Top-achievers know that getting help where or when they need it is a strength rather than weakness. They know it empowers them and allows them to make better decisions and take stronger actions. In fact, most high-performers tend to seek out coaches & mentors very early on as they want to put support structures in place to move them forward in the easiest way.

Author:
Maya Zack https://youcandoanything.co.uk



How to achieve 100% engagement from a remote workforce

Like every other business owner back in 2020 I had my doubts about employees working from home. We have a staff of around 150 and culture is at the very heart of our business. Take that face-to-face time away and the concern was would people have that bond with colleagues, would they feel motivated and valued and how – as a business – would we manage this? Yet in just a few short months we saw productivity had gone through the roof. People were clearly happy working from home and having that flexibility to take the dog for a walk or pick up the kids etc. At the end of the day, if someone gets the job done quicker and faster remotely then why not let them, it's a no brainer.

But of course, while some people thrived, others struggled. We are all different and as an employer, I think it's important to recognise there are certain things you can do to ensure staff are 100% engaged – whether they are working from home or not. My top tips would be:

1. Realise it's more than a salary

In the last two years, I've employed two or three senior executives who have been way out of my league in terms of capability, knowledge, network and salary and they've all joined this business for less than half of their salary. This is all because they believe in the purpose.

Don't get me wrong you need to pay staff well and you need attractive salaries that draw people who will match your drive, enthusiasm and expertise. But money isn't everything - it needs to be more than transactional. You need to create an environment where people feel valued, trusted and can grow. Empowering your staff can do wonders and when it comes to working from home it's even more essential. Trust is everything.

No one likes to be micromanaged. Smothering or being too intrusive is enough to put anyone off. Some businesses have installed monitoring systems on laptops to 'catch people out.' This is just a recipe for disaster creating a stressful environment and will likely lead to your staff wanting to go elsewhere. Instead, managers should give employees the freedom to structure their day whilst keeping regular lines of communication throughout the week.

2. Communication is key

Be clear and have a simple system in place. Emails can't do everything and can sometimes get lost in translation. Seeing a face even if it's just virtually can minimise miscommunication issues and can help develop a good rapport within teams. We've personally instigated a TEAMS technology where video conferences can be held when they need to be. Not vital and time-critical calls can be also scheduled. Whereas with routine matters we use regular messaging - "are you available for a call?" leaving it down to their discretion. Allowing individuals to control and plan their own workload efficiently, rather than being constantly interrupted.

However, that being said, it's still good to get some in-person time in if you can to avoid people feeling isolated. Face to face is still great for holding meetings, brainstorms, collaborating and socialising with colleagues.

3. Be Human & Authentic

People can see through insincerity. It's critical you are relatable and authentic. When they know you are genuine and that you put them first, they begin to also put you first. It's a two-way relationship.

However, the key to creating these relationships and the associated success is true vulnerability. When people relate to you and see that you are just as vulnerable as they are, the human spirit will always jump in to help someone in need.

I was there every step of the way with my employees in the pandemic ensuring regular communications throughout these difficult times to navigate them through. But I never once pretended I knew everything, instead, I was honest and transparent. I would say things like "we don't know what is going to happen any more than you do. We are all going to have to hold our breath at the same time, for the same amount of time, until we get clarity into what is going to happen."

4. People should always become before profits

If you don't invest in your staff, they won't invest in your business. You get what you put in at the end of the day. This shouldn't stop when working from home, if anything, you should invest more in training and team-building activities. You don't want to risk staff feeling like strangers and you certainly don't want them to feel bored, unchallenged and like they aren't growing.

Care for your staff and they'll care for you. In a time where mental health issues are rife and have been exacerbated by recent events, employers need to look after their staff more than ever. But how can we check in with employees' well-being when we don't see them in person that often? Well during the pandemic even with those that were furloughed we implemented a whole range of programmes which looked after both the physical and mental wellbeing of all our staff. We started a series of daily voluntary, web-based activities from quizzes, exercise classes to workshops. Working from home doesn't mean you can't have a laugh together. We personally organised an online company-wide talent show but there are plenty of other creative things you can do to boost morale and raise spirits.

DEA
CREATIVITY
NETW
NECTION
ARCH
NFORMATION
STRATEGY
ANA
OWTH
INNOVATION
SUCCESS

It's important to remember actions always speak louder than words. Show them they are valued and you care. Put colleagues' welfare and happiness before your own, and they will be behind you. Blanket policies and statements won't demonstrate this. Reward their efforts, for instance, take the team on a meal or give them a bonus. They are part of a family, not just employee numbers on a profit and loss sheet.

Author:

Jeff Dewing is the CEO of Cloudfm and author of Doing the Opposite - a bestselling book following his incredible journey from owning a successful business (and football club) to losing it all and having only £7.60 in his bank account. Despite this Jeff, who started his career as a fridge and air-conditioning engineer, managed to turn his life around and build a new business from £1m to £70m turnover within four years. He attributes much of his success to his belief that you should never take the easy, straightforward path - if you challenge things and do the opposite good things will happen. https://www.cloudfmgroup.com/

Embedding work life balance in your company culture

The new generation joining the workforce has grown up in a world of doing homework from Starbucks, booking GPs appointments online at 10pm and where in-person trips to the supermarket are a novelty.

More than money

For a long time, work life balance was seen as only of real importance to those with children and complicated nursery pick-ups, but flexible work policies are now competitive benefits and are viewed by millennials as important, if not more so, as money.

Millennials' financial future

Debt repayment programmes, season ticket loans and genuine emphasis on work life balance have real resonance to a generation that is starting its working life in debt and has often witnessed Boomer Burn-Out at first hand. Millennials are highly unlikely to be homeowners so freedom to travel is a huge priority. An extra £1000 on a salary isn't going to take them anywhere near a deposit on a home, so it's easy to see why for young people facing an uncertain financial future, freedom is the preferred priority.

Avoiding an 'always on' culture

Having a positive company culture and a healthy work life balance has always been vital for Ballou. Technology means that personal and work life boundaries are becoming blurred, and lead to an "always on" culture. We became very aware of that at Ballou and took various precautions to ensure that our teams got proper downtime – banning WhatsApp as a way of communicating with each other was one of them. We did our best to encourage people to demarcate clear lines between work and home life, and we tried to foster a culture where we would only contact each other outside core work hours in an emergency.

Define the lines of flexible working

Defining the lines of flexible working is vital, because unless the lines of demarcation are clear then a working parent can end up feeling guilty when they're not with their family and guilty about work when they are. That works for no-one. Flexible working is definitely something we encourage at Ballou, but this should not mean "always available". For example, a potential work issue occurs to you as you're putting your children to bed. Rather than shelving that for 9am the next morning, making a note of it somewhere so it doesn't slide off the to-do list, you message a question about it to a colleague or employee. They're just about to eat their evening meal and then find themselves trying to interpret if you want them to fix the issue, simply acknowledge receipt of your message or call you. They message a colleague to find out if the colleague knows more about the issue than they do. Before you know where you are, you're on a grumpy Zoom meeting at 9.30pm.

Flexible working is freedom

Boundaries are key along with a corporate culture that respects that working patterns at home are different to in an office. It's ok to be picking up your child up at 3pm so long as you're making up the time elsewhere. Similarly, we encourage people to take fitness classes when it suits them so long as they aren't neglecting their work. More flexible working is liberating for everyone, as long as it's accompanied by trust and respect on both sides.

Manage expectations

As an employee, don't assume that anyone is expecting you to be always available. Set boundaries by being assertive rather than aggressive. Don't answer messages after hours unless it is really urgent.

No after-hours messaging

As an employer, embed it in your company policy that unless it is absolutely critical no-one should be messaged after hours, to save the above situation happening. Your managers should make it clear that they are not always "on" and don't expect other people to be either. If someone emails you at 8pm don't reply (unless it's urgent) until 9am the following morning. Replying after hours gives the impression that the employee is expected to be working the same hours as you. It's the responsibility of an employer to respect these boundaries.

Look on the bright side

We started from a good place in that we had built up very robust cultural values and we live them every day, so anyone joining Ballou knows that they are coming into a company with a commitment to a healthy work life balance.

We have, thankfully, for the sake of our mental health, as a country and an industry, moved away from living to work and towards working to live. Lockdowns and working through the pandemic have been extremely tough but at the same time they have sharpened the focus on our work life balance. In our view, that is a very welcome silver lining.

Author:
Cordy Griffiths is CEO of tech agency Ballou.
https://balloupr.com/

The importance of a positive mindset and how you can achieve it

The fear and uncertainty caused by the pandemic has shaken even the most optimistic among us. However, even during the worst of times we have seen people innovate and thrive amongst the chaos - how do these high achievers maintain an unrivalled focus to achieve their goals? And, more importantly is this a skill we can all learn?

The answer is most certainly 'yes', according to Dario Bucceri, founder of the Sensemaker® Thirty Day Sprint Challenge. The Challenge was inspired by Dario's own ambition to compete in the Comrade's Ultra marathon, and the act of a fellow runner who helped him to finish the race at a point when he was about to give up.

In this article, Dario uses his own experience and expertise to create a step-by-step guide to developing a positive mindset. A mindset that will not only increase your success in business but will improve your outlook in your personal life - creating a feeling of balance and positivity that should help everything to become easier.

My positive mindset has helped me to achieve so much in my life, when first diagnosed with Parkinson's I felt very depressed and found it hard to do anything. However, once I realised that with the right medication I could manage my condition I turned it into a positive. By training my body to be as healthy as it can be, I am not only continuing as I was before but I'm working harder and achieving even more success - including the finish line of a few marathons!

Here are some of the steps that have worked for me and that I reinforce with all my clients:

Decide: A positive mindset is neither a feeling nor is it an event. Instead, it is the result of wilful decisions, the fruit of an approach to life that responds to incoming challenges with stubborn determination, sustained action, and a belief that you can influence the outcome in some way.

Omit serendipity: Serendipitous events do happen, and people do win the lottery. The odds of either taking place are so small and difficult to predict that relying on one or the other to land good fortune is unwise. It is better to get going with what you have available than to sit back and wait for the Universe to do it for you. By doing this you give serendipity, whether it arrives or not, something with which to work.

Deconstruct: Activate the positive power of what you feel is blocking your success by instead identifying these blockers as signposts to breakthroughs. By deconstructing the challenge to micro problems that have combined to form the whole overcoming them is immediately more achievable. Develop and test solutions, weaving success into "knowledge-scaffolding" to conquer even the most significant obstacle.

Act: Congruency between what you say and what you do is critical. Action brings life to words, giving power to your decisions and making them significant. Actions fuel learning as we live in a state of trial, error, and adjustment, patiently building "platforms of understanding" that, in time, will lead to the outcome we seek.

Think long term: Life takes time. Progress can be slow as we identify blockers, clarify causes, learn our lessons, and apply our learnings. It's better to set a more extended timeframe and be surprised at better-than-expected results than to aim for a quick win and be disappointed.

Find a tribe: We succeed because of people, not despite of them. If we associate with individuals who live ethically, relate honourably, think positively, take responsibility, plan specifically, execute consistently, and work efficiently, the chances are good that we will raise our game to become like them. If the people with whom we associate are lazy, unethical, dishonourable, negative, irresponsible, vague, inconsistent, inefficient, and immoral - we will become like them too.

Daily practice to define and achieve your goals

According to research by the University College of London, it takes 66 days to create a habit . By committing to building positive habits over time we can improve our outlook and productivity, here are a few that I credit with improving mine.

A product of the Sensemaker spirit is self-control. Preparing for and completing marathons is a wonderful place to develop this trait. That said, any exercise, at any level, that empowers you to test your limits, to practise a marathon mindset is, in my view going to be valuable. You certainly don't need to be sporty or super healthy, I began with the NHS couch to 5km app when I struggled to jog for thirty seconds!

Treat other people the way you want to be treated. Tell the truth and talk straight. Listen more. Think in terms of outcomes and next steps. If a meeting starts without an agenda, end it. If a conversation becomes unnecessary call it. Make every word and action count. Don't manipulate. Take time to listen. Empower others to progress. When resolving operational issues, always start with the process.

Something that I ask all my sprinters (clients taking on the Thirty Day Sprint Challenge) to do is to record a daily journal. Journalling is important because without a vision (a picture of a preferred future to aim for), people become like a rudderless ship on a journey that has no destination. Subject to the currents and winds, the ship drifts aimlessly and inevitably finds its way to the rocks

Similarly, if you have a dream and its fulfilment is delayed indefinitely, they can be negatively impacted too.

The final piece of the puzzle is this – what I think about is where I will go.

Let us pull this all together. I can increase the probability of achieving a goal by having one (that seems obvious). I can increase the probability further by writing it down (creating a fixed expression of the goal) and can increase it again by thinking about it. The more I think about it, the more probable it becomes that I will attain it.

Enter my journal. Once each day, I catch myself doing things right by recording my "Thankfuls", those outcomes and events for which I am grateful. I remember my goals as I write them reminding myself of the tasks I committed to complete to move them forward as I write those too. I take time to think, to reflect, to develop and enhance what I am doing.

I write my vision down so that I can run with it, and then I meditate on it often, giving action to my words, making them important, bringing them to pass.

By developing good habits, giving ourselves goals and the time to achieve them and reminding ourselves of these goals we are much more likely to achieve them.

When life gives you lemons

All this said, even armed with the most positive mindset, life does and will get in the way of your goals - what separates those who will succeed and those who will lose sight of their goals is the response.

Take control of these moments by finding a quiet place and allow time to make sense of what is going on around you. High achievers know that with every mistake and failure you will learn something that makes you more resilient to face future challenges and more thankful and excited for the success that lies ahead.

Author: Dario Bucceri

Great Expectations: Adapting to the New Digital Consumer

As recent times have seen the emergence of a very different digital customer, complete with new different behaviours and decision making criteria, businesses must continue to evolve their online proposition to stay relevant.

Here, Dominik Angerer co-founder and CEO of Storyblok, advises on the importance of flexibility marketing as businesses now seek to no longer seek to compete with their competitors – but rather their customers' last best online experience.

Consumer expectations were already on the rise before Coronavirus hit, especially for Gen Z who have had technology seamlessly integrated into their lives since day dot. Now though, with the pandemic inducing a marked digital shift which as impacted all parts of society, regardless of age, it has raised the digital bar even higher.

The majority of customers are now using online channels, they know how to source the best deals, which websites they prefer and are comfortable making more purchases online.

But that's not to say it's made ecommerce any easier. Amid the upsurgence of social media platforms for customer service, visual commerce and video sharing, consumers are much more likely to gravitate to those companies who command their interest with compelling experiences.

More than ever it's about hyper-personalisation and customer centricity, anticipating and addressing their individual needs, inspiring demand and providing products which are simple to purchase and supported with flexible after-care for a seamless digital transaction.

And this digital mandate is only going to grow. According to recent research1 more than half (55%) of UK adults will interact with brands more through digital and virtual channels than face-to-face post-pandemic. A separate global study has reveals that 50 percent of consumers won't engage with a brand as often if it doesn't offer online experiences.2

Clearly then, those who do not continue to create good online experiences and consider how to ensure brand differentiation online, run the risk of losing custom. This will become even more pertinent as face-to-face brand-building opportunities are reduced.

But with the Christmas on the horizon and so many other considerations for the busy business trying to recoup any losses incurred during the past 18 months, where to begin?

First impressions count

Did you know that it takes less than a second for a user to form an opinion about your website that determines whether they'll stay or go?3

An even more sobering fact is that 88 per cent of online shoppers wouldn't return to a site after a bad experience.3

The reality is that the Internet doesn't give out second chances and as your shop window your website is everything in attracting pulling power, getting consumers to pull out their purse – and even more importantly, come backing.

It's perhaps surprising then that many companies still fail to get it right. According to an extensive analysis4 of the Fortune 500 website homepages conducted by Storyblok, only one in five had a performance score – based on a number of key metric such design, SEO, accessibility – above 50%. More so, we found that 92% needed to improve their website best practices and 64% needed to improve their SEO scores.

What's the real shame is that the reality is that creating an immersive, dynamic online experience which is intuitive to your customers' needs and easily adaptable doesn't necessarily have to be either complex or expensive.

Staying ahead with headless CMS

The big mistake many companies make is in thinking that getting a big tech stack from a well-known brand is the best and easiest way to enable a successful marketing output. Not only is this usually an expensive approach, but it may also mean being locked into using products that don't fit your business's changing needs.

Instead, there are now a huge range of new solutions available that, via APIs, can usually be easily integrated together. This means you have the freedom to build a suite of tools that work for your business. In addition, you also have the flexibility to swap out different solutions as your marketing develops.

Identifying just what you need comes down to how you think about the future of your business and its marketing output. As consumers continue to crave personalisation, creating a suite of tools that enables you to amend content quickly and easily is essential. So too is the ability to leverage existing customer data and other information streams to provide tailored and relevant marketing messages. A headless CMS that is flexible enough and can output content in different channels enables this type of marketing strategy.

The final major piece of the puzzle is building the expertise you need to maximise the impact of your marketing. Gone are the days when a catchy email subject line or funny tweet would be enough to draw significant attention to your brand. You are no longer competing against your competitors but your customers' last best online experience – so you need to make it count. Everything from delivering dynamic content on your website through to post-conversion follow up needs to happen. This requires having a marketing department that is multidisciplinary and cross-functional. They need to have data, development, commercial and marketing skills and, critically, ensuring a regular flow of information between other departments is essential. For example, data gleaned from marketing can inform product development and data gathered from areas such as customer service are needed to enable a truly personal experience.

Of course this may seem like a lot of work but get it right and the rewards can be great. Take for example, our recent work with leading Swedish beauty brand Stronger. Thanks to a new technology stack and headless CMS the business now has much greater creative scope and is able to deliver monthly campaigns in line with seasonal trends, key calendar events and changing customer requirements. The result? Just six months in and has helped to boost revenue by 172% while also supporting business' successful expansion into the USA.

Realistically speaking, investing in a new marketing approach and the infrastructure approach, while a lot easy than you may think, might be achievable in time for Christmas. But, for the shrewd looking to ensure relevant, create stand-out and grow market share in 2022, it's certainly one New Year's resolution to add to the list.

https://www.storyblok.com/

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Mentoring For Business Success

Running a business can be hugely rewarding. I am not talking about money, but making things happen, seeing ideas work, good people succeeding. It can also be deeply frustrating and brutally challenging. I have found there is one thing above all else that helps with what is difficult. Mentoring.

Guidance from someone outside a business that has experience, or specialist knowledge, not only helps in providing practical answers, but is a great stress reliever. You have someone that can show you how to overcome a problem, is on your side, and willing to help. Mentoring is normally cost free, but you can't put a price on it.

It is true, that no mentor will have gone through the exact experience others face. But there are so many commonalities to so many business situations that it is inevitable that there is someone out there that can help with any given challenge. Someone that is an expert, or has been confronted by a similar problem and overcome it, or perhaps having analysed the situation with hindsight, they worked out what they should have done.

I have used mentors successfully to navigate varying scenarios. And it is amazing how many people will help.

There is great value to be found from having someone to share a problem with, not just providing solutions. Anyone who leads a company knows it can be a lonely place no matter how good the supporting managers you have. Having someone that relates, and is willing to talk through situations is a great antidote to leadership pressure.

Here are my examples of using mentors. It shows the breadth of guidance and support there is out there.

A good case was when I was in the process of establishing an office in Shanghai. I clearly knew how it should function in terms of what was required, but my knowledge of the cultural dynamics of building a team in China was limited. I needed help, and I wanted it from someone that had been in the same position as me. I could not have had more success in discovering exactly the right person. They helped with much more than the immediate challenge, and though no longer a mentor, we keep in touch, and always meet when I'm back in China.

I got another mentor at the same time to assist with wellbeing. I had an exercise and yoga programme that worked effectively, but more work pressure started to equal more stress. I got a mentor to get my mindset into the right place, and it worked.

On another occasion I found a mentor to assist with the Chinese business culture of managing staff. This was enormously helpful, and the same person is now helping me to improve my written and spoken Mandarin.

One of the things that stands out from my use of mentors are the subjects I got support with, and how unusual some of them were. But also, how I managed to source mentoring help relatively easily. If I could get mentors for specialist needs, then how much more simple to address more generic needs.

Undoubtedly, there is nearly always someone out there available and willing to help, We nearly all walk in the steps of others, and those that have gone before mostly have empathy for those that follow.

Deciding whether you should get a mentor?

For those that doubt the need for a mentor consider whether there are weaknesses that you would like to eliminate. Are there tasks you struggle with, the things you don't like doing? What are the biggest headaches in your business? If these criteria apply then you could usefully be getting guidance. Whether this applies at personal level, or as a function of the company, there will be someone that can help reduce problems, or make them go away.

Sourcing the right mentor

Finding an appropriate mentor involves doing homework. View it as an investment. That is exactly what it is. Be prepared to spend time looking because the right mentor is likely to recoup the investment several times over, and not just in terms of providing solutions and money saving, but also the pricelessness of relief from work challenges. Frequently, mentor selection is based on finding someone in the same sector of trade, or stage of company development, but neither of these factors may be important criteria if help is needed with people management, finance, training, outsourcing, or other generic functions. It means there are often a lot of options available.

What is important is chemistry. You have to be on the same wavelength more or less, because communication needs to be easy, and you may be with a mentor quite a lot of time whether face to face, on video calls or the phone. What you need is an effective working partnership. You do not need to becoming good friends, though that is my experience, but you have to be able to talk without personalities getting in the way.

Mentoring is for all managers

The subject of mentoring is nearly always focused on business founders and leaders, but it shouldn't be. Middle and junior managers have to confront problems too. Most management support structure is built on line managers providing help, but in busy companies this may not happen even with the best intentions. Also, and no matter how open the management culture of a particular business is, individuals are reluctant to flag the fact they have a problem, or are struggling. It is human nature to cover up weakness in front of colleagues.

However, consulting someone from outside an organisation is not the same as going to a superior. A third party perspective based on experience provides answers, but also creates assurance irrespective of management level. Mentoring is cathartic whoever you are.

Pay it back

I am a firm believer in paying it back. After benefiting so much from mentoring, I know how useful it can be, and believe it is important to share my own knowledge and experience. Currently I mentor two people that have recently founded start-ups. I know it saves each of them time, stress and money.

Mentoring becoming a mainstream practice would make a significant difference to business owners, managers, and companies. So many practices can be improved. It would ultimately reflect on the economy overall. We can all learn, but often don't. Mentoring also removes a lot of work pressure. I recommend trying it.

Author:

Domenica Di Lieto, founder and CEO of Chinese planning and marketing consultancy, Emerging Communications. https://www.emergingcomms.com

What failure can teach us about success

In business, failure is as much a part of life as success, if not more so. Entrepreneurs are often driven by high achievement and therefore can feel setbacks deeply, but handled in the right way, challenges can propel us forward to go on to achieve even greater things.

What do success and failure mean to you?

The very concepts of 'success' and 'failure' are deeply subjective terms that are rarely as black and white as profit and loss. Moreover, these concepts can be heavily influenced by our own perceptions of a situation and how we frame things in our minds. Think of a time you pitched an idea to a group. You might have come away thinking it landed horribly, or people just didn't get your idea. That feeling of failure has crept in. However, the group might have loved your idea and wanted to discuss it further internally before sharing any feedback with you.

Considering and understanding context is, therefore, incredibly important when it comes to determining how to move on from either end of the success/failure spectrum. What were your goals to start with? Where have you come from to get where you are now? What can you learn from where you are today to take you into tomorrow?

What causes us to fail?

One of the most common reasons for failure is poor expectation and goal setting from the outset. It is human nature to overestimate what we can do and place ourselves on an unattainably high pedestal. But if we shoot for the moon and fail, it becomes all the more painful a process to recover from. Instead, if we are realistic with our goals and specific about what we want from the get-go, it will help give a clearer indication of what success or failure will look like based on the outcomes we achieve.

If your goals are dependent on a team, a shared agreement of what those goals are, and a common sense of purpose are absolutely essential to ensure everyone is clear about what it is they are working to achieve and in what way.

Strong leadership action is key. The role of a strong leader is key. The most effective leadership action involves outlining a clear sense of direction, whilst also setting the tone to invite everyone to participate without fear of judgement or reproach. This is known as 'psychological safety' and is critical to facilitating good conversations where everyone feels their input is valued and important. This enables people to feel comfortable within a group and more likely to perform at their best. Teams who are not having good conversations, are not likely to succeed.

Moreover, it is also important to think about how teams are built and come together. Our human nature is to gravitate towards people who mirror ourselves, but homogeneity and 'group think' can often be the enemy of success. To innovate, you need diversity amongst your team so as to find as many differing perspectives on how best to reach your goal or tackle a problem.

What to do when failure strikes

Research has shown that when we experience a set-back, how we choose to respond can fundamentally affect our brains. Specifically, internalising a failure (or something we perceive to have been a failure) and dwelling on it, can eventually impair our ability to function in the future. So, it's important to remember that success and failure are like a rollercoaster. You have to have the highs and the lows, but there will always be a way up again.

Positive thinking is not simply a cliched motivational message to be added to mugs, it really does make a difference. By using positive language in our thoughts, we can shift our thinking to reinforce the messages we need to be successful. For instance, instead of "I hope I don't make a mistake during this meeting with a client" turn it into "During this meeting I will speak clearly with confidence because my idea is worth sharing."

Studies have shown that focusing on the positives of our outcomes, even our failures, we can shrink the psychological hurt we feel as a result. This is important because when we experience failure and it hurts us, our subconscious tells us that we never want to fail at that same thing again, giving us a propensity to avoid doing anything similar again in order to prevent the hurt. This is known as avoidance motivation.

The counter to avoidance motivation is promotion motivation, which is the process of telling yourself something went well and celebrating it. By recognising your progress in small chunks and reviewing that process, it extends our enjoyment of our achievements if we take the small wins. Our brains accelerate as we perceive success to be closer, so the more we see achievement, the closer we feel we're getting to it. When running a marathon, our brains simply couldn't cope if we just focused on getting to the end of the 26 miles, but if we tackle it by celebrating a series of smaller milestones, it increases our motivation and helps accelerate achievement. The same approach can be taken with business goals.

British tennis player Emma Raducanu demonstrated a brilliant response to adversity after she opted to drop out of the Wimbledon following health issues, despite a promising start to the competition. Instead of dwelling on the situation, she actively took control of the narrative by retelling her story by focusing on the positives of her game up until the point she had to drop out. The strategy worked well, and she went on to win the US Open only a few months later.

How to fail to facilitate success

It is true that most start-up businesses fail.This, however, is not necessarily a negative. If in doubt, considerthe countless, hugely successful, entrepreneurs who have all had their fair share of business failures along their path to success.

Failure is a positive when you use it to influence how you plan for the future and provides an additional set of tools to help you flex and deal with adversity in the future.

It's useful to take a strength-based approach to this, which means regrouping and learning from the positives of the experience as opposed to trying to solve problems. Ask yourselves what went well? How did you achieve what you did? What processes helped you achieve this? What values did you work to in order to deliver those strengths? Now, how can you shape those strengths to reimagine them in a positive light?

When going through this process, it's good to have open and honest conversations which use positive language to build on people's ideas, even if they are not views shared across the group. Taking a human-centred approach plays a huge part in building empathy amongst the team which will help boost productivity in the long term.

The most successful people accept and expect failure to happen and therefore plan accordingly for it. For an effective strategy, be sure to build in an 'in case of emergency' style plan so that if and when things go wrong, you are more prepared to respond.

None of us are gifted with a crystal ball, so there will inevitably be things that do occur that are outside of our control. In order to respond to those sorts of challenges, it is helpful to always try and keep time back in the day to 'expect the unexpected'. By doing so, it helps us to always keep one eye on our ultimate long term strategic goals, whilst still retaining an all important ability to react in the moment.

About the author:

Stuart Kelly is a Performance Psychology Consultant at Impact, a global leadership development and creative change agency.

Website: https://www.impactinternational.com/

How to Use Social Media to Supercharge Your Brand's Success

Hana Johansen, co-founder of 100% natural remy hair extension brand Gee Hair, shares her advice on how to use social media to supercharge your brand's success.

2020 and 2021 were turning points when it came to the digital landscape and the pandemic had a massive impact on the way we as brands connect to our customers and how we run our businesses. That's why it's so important that brands don't restrict themselves when it comes to the ways in which they connect with potential customers. That being said, it's also important to play to your strengths.

Here at Gee Hair, we have social media channels on Instagram, Twitter, Youtube and Facebook, as well as a customer service email and number on Whatsapp. All of these platforms are valuable to our audience in different ways, with our biggest platform by far being Instagram, where we have over 230k followers and steady engagement on our posts.

So how do we do it? And how can you?

Here are some of my top tips on how you can use platforms such as these to reach a wider audience than ever before and ultimately increase your brand awareness and customer satisfaction.

Increase your organic engagement

Thanks to the billions of people that use social media all over the world, it's more important now than ever that brands engage and interact with their consumers. Here at Gee Hair, one of the things that makes us truly unique is our customer service.

We love interacting with our customers, and at the end of the day it's about more than just hair; it's the customers themselves that carry the business, and if we want people to engage with us and buy our products, then it only makes sense that we engage with them, right? We see our customers as friends, and social media lets us have that personal connection with them.

Posting regularly, once or more a day at certain times, is one thing you've probably heard about that can help potential customers see your posts. But if you're posting everyday then you should make sure you're not just posting for the sake of it, or that your posts don't come across as robotic or lifeless. Increasingly so in the last few years, people's loyalty to brands are heavily influenced by their social media posts and customer service interactions. If your feed is full of pasted captions and uninspired stock photos, you rarely reply to comments on your posts, or you don't check your direct messages - that's going to turn people away before they even look at your website or products.

Of all the posts on our Instagram, the ones that consistently do the best for engagement are ones for contests or giveaways, where customers are incentivized to interact by liking, commenting or tagging their friends. But contests aren't the only way of giving your audience this incentive. Other brands might have a question of the day, or they might run a poll for their audience to ask what they would like to see or if there is anything about the current product or service they might change. We love hearing customers' thoughts on our products, and a lot of those reviews and suggestions have really shaped our current products and the way we do things. After all, as a business you're catering to your clientele, so it's absolutely vital that you take their feedback on board.

Stuck for post ideas? Get to know your audience.

Ask yourself 'how do I want my audience to feel when they look at my posts?'. Do you want people to feel empowered by your brand and products? Are they there for convenience, or are they innovative and exciting? A lot of businesses forget that not only are you using social media to advertise to customers, you're also using it to connect with them. Think of your ideal customer, the customer that you want to buy your product. What do they find relatable? What will make them stop scrolling in their feed and take the time to comment or leave a like, or even head on over to your website?

On the Gee Hair Instagram we've posted about women empowerment, beauty, even jokes and cute animals! We keep to our pink colour theme with all our posts, and maybe add a dash of editing here and there to make our posts stand out in a crowd yet fit together seamlessly and be recognisable as ours. Because we know our audience and they know us, it gets plenty of engagement. So don't be afraid to put a little of yourself into your social media feed! It will show that you're having fun with things and that you have passion for your grind, making you a lot more appealing to your customers. And let's be real—when it comes to social media, soulless advertising is always a turn off.

Taking advantage of other formats too, like video or even livestream can be hugely beneficial, especially for things like tutorials or demonstrations. On our Instagram page we have a few story highlights so people can look at reviews or tutorials if that's what they came to the page for, and it gives them a quick and easy insight into the vibe of our posts so they can decide right away if they want to follow or not.

But there's more to it than just posting...

Another question to ask yourself is 'what else, apart from posting, needs to be done to achieve my social media goals?' Building a recognisable and effective social media presence is more work than meets the eye. At Gee Hair, we work closely with a lot of influencers on Instagram as well as other social media platforms, and use the sites to keep up to date with the

Google
Tagged
GMX SMS
Messages
Tumblr
Drop
Skype
Myspace
Google+
foursquare
LinkedIn
Facebook
Messenger
Twitter
WhatsApp
XING
Mail

latest trends in the hair and beauty industry. This lets us know what styles our customers might want to see, or what sort of posts will do the best.

Researching the algorithm of your platform of choice is also something you should definitely spend some time on, as this will let you know how to get your posts seen more easily! It's all well and good having a ton of hashtags in your tweets, but did you know that Twitter is then more likely to mark your tweets as spam, and you'll actually get less engagement? It can be frustrating for small businesses trying to get a foothold and build an audience, which is why it's absolutely worth doing the research before you get started!

For Instagram, engaging with your followers, following accounts, replying to comments and liking posts will genuinely help your organic outreach, and your posts will be shown to more people! Remember: there's no shortcut for building an audience that truly cares about your posts and your business, and starting out is always the most difficult bit. But don't be disheartened; we were all there once.

Also - don't be tempted to buy followers or use some other means of getting ahead fast; Instagram's algorithm will be able to recognise if you're being inauthentic, and long-term it won't grant you the success you're aiming for here. I can't stress enough the importance of taking the time to build your brand's quality as this will really speak for itself - like I said, no shortcuts!

Be passionate! Passion is the key to so many things in life, including being successful with both an organic customer base and the algorithms that control so much of social media. Gee Hair wouldn't be where it is today without the passion of me and my sister Cindy. We know what we're good at and we know how to keep our motivation high to keep the ball rolling on everything, which is definitely a skill learned over our years of experience.

I truly believe that mindset is everything, especially when you're just starting out. You can't expect to come across as a lively, friendly brand that people will genuinely enjoy seeing on their feeds if you're not truly passionate about it! You've got to make sure your brand and product is something you believe in, because otherwise how can you expect your customers to feel the same?

Author:
Hana Johansen is the co-founder of 100% natural remy hair extension brand Gee Hair.
https://geehair.com/

Why your personality type could be the key to driving and preventing business success

There have been thousands of books written about what it takes to be successful in business, but what isn't as widely spoken about is how much your personality traits could impact your chances of success.

According to Dr Mike Allan, a psychologist and associate director of employment advisory firm Livingstones Australia, it is possible to predict if an individual is more or less likely to be a successful entrepreneur purely by looking at their personal characteristics.

BizSmart's own research also found this to be true and revealed a strong correlation between business success and personality type in our recently published ScaleUp Challenges report.

Why personality type is important

As a business owner, understanding where your strengths lie by undergoing some personality profiling can be hugely valuable and could hold the key to taking your business to the next level. Not only can it help you communicate better, but it can also allow you to expand your horizons and improve your own skill set.

Whilst succeeding as a business owner requires certain traits and attitudes, building a solid team that works well together is clearly vital, too. Understanding people -- their behaviour, motivations, fears, and challenges – is a necessity for businesses to improve their performance, and understanding your employees' personality traits and working styles as well as your own can help you establish whether weaknesses are within yourself, or within your wider business.

By understanding your own personality type, you can lead others more effectively by focusing on your strengths and being aware of any potential pit falls, as well as understanding others' strengths and requirements to succeed. So, where do you begin?

DISC analysis

There are many different types of personality profiling you can undertake but DISC analysis is, without a doubt, one of the most effective.

DISC analysis is a behavioural assessment tool which measures personality and behavioural style, such as how you respond to challenges, how you influence others and how you respond to rules and procedures.

In business, DISC is used to analyse leadership styles and to help business owners understand their own strengths and weaknesses and the types of people they need within their organisation to build a cohesive and effective team. Typically, DISC profiles are administered as a speed quiz, encouraging participants to answer the questions as quickly as they can and then move on. This added pressure means participants have less time to think through their answers and give what they perceive to be the 'correct' answer – they just respond with their gut. This means the responses are genuine reflections of their behaviours – which is exactly what you want.

The four personality types explained

There are four primary DISC profiles, which we at BizSmart have translated into birds to represent each personality type. The profiles are divided as follows:

- Dominance [Falcon]: Commanding individuals motivated by authority, competition and success who are self-confident, direct and forceful by nature
- Influence [Cockatoo]: Energised, pioneering and affirmative individuals motivated by social recognition and strong relationships
- Steadiness [Dove]: Supportive, stable and collaborative individuals who are patient, calm and possess excellent listening and team skills
- Conscientiousness [Owl]: Quiet and reserved individuals focused on accuracy who are motivated by an opportunity to use expertise or gain knowledge

When questioning business owners with each personality type on the challenges they faced, we found an obvious link between their individual traits and the hurdles they were trying to overcome on their business growth journeys.

For example, 50% of individuals with a Dove profile revealed they struggle to remain on track with any plan compared to just 21% of Falcons, whilst 57% of Falcons said they struggle to attract and retain enough of the right people, compared to just 15% of Owls and 22% of Doves.

Work/life balance was another divisive factor between each type, with 36% of Falcons working 60 hours plus compared to just 6% of Cockatoos, 0% of owls and 6% of Doves. There is no right or wrong when it comes to your personality type

Whilst these findings shed an interesting light on where some personality types fall down on their business growth journeys, it's important to know that all DISC styles and priorities are equally valuable. The idea of learning about your personality profile is not to find out if you are better than anyone else but is instead to gain a better understanding of yourself and how you think about situations.

Everyone sits differently on the scale, but by examining where you and your employees' fall you can better understand decisions that are being made within your business and in what areas you and others are holding it back, so that you can take steps to rectify it.

Conclusion

The above points are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to understanding how personality type can affect your business, and clearly it is worth taking the time to get to know both yours and your employees' unique traits to improve self-awareness and, in turn, organisational effectiveness.

Accepting the strengths and weaknesses of yourself and those around you can not only improve your ability to work more positively with your team but everyone you encounter and will help put your business on the path to sustainable growth and success.

Kevin Brent is director of business support provider and franchise, BizSmart. https://www.bizsmart.co.uk/

How to Overcome Imposter Syndrome

Have you ever felt like you're not good enough? Like you're a fraud or you're going to get found out? That you're in a room full of people who are so much better than you?

Well, that is called imposter syndrome and you're in good company as 70% of us feel like this at some point in our life, with women being much more susceptible to this than men.

And whilst women are more likely to suffer from imposter syndrome it can impact anyone. Imposter syndrome is not a diagnosed medical condition, nor are there any magic potions to make it go away, but it is essential to tackle head on and make sure that it does not have a debilitating effect on your work and success.

Those suffering from imposter syndrome will often start a task or new job with strong feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy and often anxiety. And even when they are successful or have achieved the desired outcome, they often attribute this to luck, a fluke or overworking. These cycle of thoughts often make you feel like a fraud waiting to be exposed which then perpetuates and aggravates these self doubting beliefs.

Needless to say, this is not the case and these individuals are competent and suitable for the task in hand. High achievers are generally more prone to this phenomenon because of their school or university career. Where they would have previously attributed their successes to a percentage or letter determining their intelligence, in the working world their abilities hold no solid 'grade' proof and in most cases the constant worry of being exposed or tagged as such can result in anxiety and depression. *

So how do you overcome this? Or is this just the way things are always going to be?

I've had years of working on overcoming challenges all linked to imposter syndrome and I know I'm not alone! So, I want to share my process for recognising those imposter feelings, acknowledging them for what they are (not true!) and releasing them so you can start confidently and powerfully showing up and serving your audience - and boosting your business to the next level.

Tip one: Let's get visual

Whenever any feelings of doubt creep in, I visualise a dark little devil sitting on my right shoulder. He tells me the things that keep me safe, don't stretch me or put me in the way of danger. He's the voice that says "Don't do that because something bad will happen" or "You can't do that". By visualising him and giving him a persona, this really helps me recognise what is going on and helps me stop him in his tracks.

In contrast to the little devil (the imposter syndrome), I also have my angel sitting on my left shoulder. She is full of light and positivity, and whispers "You can do this, give it a go, what's the worst that can happen", "you're going to be good at this, you've got all this experience, you've done all these things... use them!" I visualise her as having warmth and energy.

Both of these personas have very different voices and agendas, both make me feel and act very differently. But the process I use when I hear these voices is the same:
Recognise: Firstly, I recognise whose voice it is. Is it the imposter devil or my positive angel?

Acknowledge: Then I acknowledge what they are saying to me. Is it useful, factually accurate, worth listening to?
Release: Finally it's about releasing. I choose not to listen to the negative voice if he's whispering unhelpful things, releasing his negativity, and only take on board what the angel says to me.

To release I use an NLP technique which taught me to visualise a huge stop sign as soon as I recognise the little devil's words. I visualise putting it in front of him. He can't get over it, under it or round it... and he's definitely not getting through it!

This is something you need to keep working on as the imposter naturally can come back from time to time, (there's a saying 'new level, new devil, for a reason!) but when it does, I just use the same technique.

If you're not a visual person, you can try writing the thoughts down then physically throwing them away, or using another powerful stop word which resonates with you. Just keep trying different techniques until you find one that works for you. I also encourage you to welcome your angel's voice and all the positive thinking surrounding that - visualise all the things you can achieve and start believing in yourself. After all, what you believe is what you can achieve.

Tip two: The worry journal

Another technique which worked wonders for helping me manage feelings of anxiety and worry was a 'worry journal'. You only need to spend 10-15 mins a day writing down and 'brain-dumping' all the things that worry you - it's a purposeful, allocated time for worry, so don't go over the time slot.

All worriers know that once you start worrying about one thing it can easily spiral. Allocating a set time is really powerful as you're recognising those feelings, you're acknowledging them but you're not letting them control you, and you're releasing them by getting them out of your head

so they aren't whirring around and getting jumbled with reality.

You are taking back the power of how you feel, act and think - and that is the key to stepping up and showing up powerfully to your audience.

Tip three: Flip reverse it...

This leads me nicely on how to flip the imposter and turn those negative thoughts into positive questions that you could use to your advantage. For example, if you hear him saying "You can't do this" change this to "How can I do this?" Reframing your language is one of the most powerful things you can do for your self-belief.

You owe it to yourself, your clients, and future clients to show up and share your expertise. Only by stepping out of your comfort zone will you create a new comfort zone and edge closer to your goals.

So, what are you waiting for?

Experiencing bouts of imposter syndrome is entirely normal and natural, some people are more susceptible than others, but know that you are not alone! We usually hear his little growling voice when we're stretching ourselves out of our comfort zones, so it can be seen as a good sign. Remember, 'new level, new devil' - but you can stop him in his tracks and step fully into your power.

*https://www.sciencedaily.com releases/2021/03/210316112323.htm

About the Author

Rhiannon Bates is the driving force behind Garnet PR, a boutique agency specialising in mindset, business and PR coaching for female business owners, particularly service-based business or those in the rural and luxury lifestyle sectors. She also provides Public Relations services for high-level female coaches and entrepreneurs. www.garnetpr.com

Mindset Matters: How to Embrace Change

Life moves and evolves and sometimes change can be tough and sometimes it can be welcome. In the last few years many of us have been forced to change the way we work, the way we socialise, our holiday plans and the way we keep in touch with friends and family. Some of this change has been heartbreaking, some has been unsettling and disappointing and other changes have delivered unexpected silver linings.

Here are five simple ways to cope with change and build resilience, in just a few minutes a day.

Take care of the basics

If you want to emerge from change fighting fit and raring to go then you need to take care of the basics. That means eating healthy food, getting enough micro-nutrients, enough sleep and drinking plenty of water.

That doesn't mean that you can't have take-outs or go out for a few drinks – just take care of the basics most of the time. Getting enough rest is also crucial. To help with sleep make sure you don't have a TV in your bedroom and ideally don't have your phone in your bedroom. Get an alarm clock and charge your phone in the kitchen. Trust me – the world will not tilt on its axis if you are not within touching distance of your phone for a few hours.

Make eating well easy for yourself. Take a few minutes to plan your meals for the week and make sure there is plenty fresh fruit and vegetables in the house. Also consider a social media detox for a day or so. You might be surprised at how much better you feel.

Natural Health Service

We've all been in awe of the National Health Service through the pandemic but the Natural Health Service is also worth shouting about. Change, even positive change or change that we are excited about, can cause disruption and elevated stress. Cortisol is the body's main stress hormone and too much of it can cause havoc to our health and mental wellbeing. Cortisol also creates negative feedback loops which means that the more cortisol we create in the body the worse we feel which in turn creates even more cortisol in a downward spiral.

It's so important to break that downward spiral as quickly as possible and one great way is to get near nature – a park will do. Pay attention to the sounds and smells and simply enjoy some quiet time and the fresh air. As autumn is with us, one thing I love doing, especially with my children, is trying (and succeeding) to catch a falling leaf. It's also a great game and it looks very silly to anyone watching. The bigger leaves like sycamore and horse chestnut are far easier to catch as they're bigger, but there's great kudos if you catch a smaller one like an oak leaf. You might even create a game with points awarded for the how many you catch and how hard they are based on their size. Being outside in or around nature has restorative powers that allow us to get back on an even keel, so we can more forward constructively with the change.

Instead of sitting inside to eat your lunch, why not go to a local park with some work friends and enjoy lunch al fresco. If possible, add in a little walk too. Just breathe and listen to the sights and sounds of nature.

Make a move

Another great way to disperse cortisol in your system is to move and get physically active. You don't need to go overboard – no need to pound the pavement at 5am. Just move your body. Put on a favourite song and dance around your living room—like no one is watching—for a few minutes.

The next time you need a hit of confidence during the change process, go to the bathroom and engage in two minutes of superhero pose. You may feel silly at first, but it will do wonders for your health and wellbeing.

Celebrate Failure

Change requires us to do, think or be different in some way. This often means mistakes, failures and slip ups along the way. It's rare that we move seamlessly from one position to the other without some stumbles. Learning to ride a bike is a change—change from walking to a new form of transport—and learning to ride a bike doesn't just happen miraculously, like the flick of a switch. It's a journey of anxiety, questionable balance and a few scrapes. Everyone fails their way to riding a bike.

We all know this and yet when we become adults, we dread failure. It is seen as a weakness or something that must be hidden or fudged. And that is rubbish! Failure is the only way to succeed at anything, including successful change. This is known as having a growth mindset – the idea that everything is possible and we can get better at anything if we stick with it and persevere.

Take a minute to think about how many times you have embarked on change and created unrealistically high expectations for yourself. Stop expecting immediate perfection and instead settle for consistent effort.

Positive Habits

What do you love? What makes you happy? Is it meeting up with friends, listening to really loud music or singing at the top of your lungs in the car on the way to work? Do you love taking some time out and reading a good thriller? Or do you just enjoying some family time at the end of a challenging week? Whatever it is, do more of it.

Change can be disconcerting. It can feel like your whole life is being shaken, so deliberately hang on to the positive habits that already make you feel happy and safe. If you don't have any of those, make them. Take a minute to think back to a time in your life when you felt especially peaceful or happy. What exactly were you doing? Have you stopped doing that? If so, why?

Another great habit to get into is appreciation. In the shower in the morning or on your daily commute, take a few minutes to think about the three things that you are most grateful for in your life. Relish those things in the midst of change.

I'm a great believer in instant change, little 'micro-moments' of learning or adaptation that allow us to actively take charge of our situation and emotions in the moment, to reset and to bring more of our best to help ourselves and others. By taking just a few minutes a day and following the suggestions above you can put yourself in the best possible state of mind to manage change successfully.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sid Madge is the founder of Meee which draws on the best creativity and thinking from the worlds of psychology, neuroscience, branding, education and sociology, to help people achieve extraordinary lives. To date, Meee has transformed the lives of over 20,000 people, from leaders of SMEs to PLCs, to parents, teachers, students, carers, the unemployed and prison inmates.

Sid Madge is also author of the 'Meee in a Minute' series of books, which each offer 60 ways to change your life, work or family life in 60 seconds.

Web: www.meee.global

Spring Luxury Lifest

tyle

Flexjet - A New Horizon

Flying private has traditionally been reserved for the elite, a tailored travelling experience that minimises travel stress, and allows customers to arrive seamlessly to their destination in the highest level of comfort and luxury.

Private air travel has many perks, from beating queues and long travel times to avoiding potential health risk exposure and guaranteed exceptional customer service. Depending on the purpose of the flight, Flexjet aircraft can be entirely modified to the customer, styled and catered according to their preferences. From elevated catering, cocktails and drinks to more private, business focused set ups, each flight is completely tailored to the Flexjet customer. The Praetor 600 is perfect for small groups up to 10 people including a cabin server, with a comfortable configuration of individual seats and benches, carefully designed and executed using premium materials from across the globe to curate spectacular cabin environments.

Flying private successfully soared to new heights post-pandemic and is continuing to provide frequent flyers with world leading luxury travel. An upward trajectory of fractional ownership on aircrafts has enabled jet owners to fully utilise its capabilities, whilst minimising time on the ground, underutilization and fixed overhead costs.

Both surprisingly and unsurprisingly, half of the world's Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) was used by private jets last year. As the movement to sustainability continues to push forward, those in a position to spend more for that fuel are able to do so. Reducing carbon emissions by 80 per cent, SAF greatly contributes to reducing the footprint of private travel. With Flexjet at the helm of this movement, they recognise that offsetting on its own is not a long-term solution, but with the continued use of SAF, it is hoped to make the highest level of impact when reducing aviation emissions.

The next big market focuses for the company include new routes in Europe and the Middle East, further opening up the travel capabilities for Flexjet customers and globalising more sustainable luxury travel.

Flexjet customers also have the benefit of enjoying VIP access to world class events and properties supported and partnered with the company. Partnering with properties around the world, Flexjet are connecting their customers with exclusive global experiences. These bespoke experiences are not limited to just events and hotel stays. Customers can also benefit from private sport sessions with famous players, Michelin star dinners and private dining in some of the most sought after restaurants.

Seasonal events like the world famous St. Moritz Snow Polo tournament is a prominent fixture amongst the Flexjet customers who are able to land at Samedan airport in the heart of the Swiss Alps. This mountainous region is a breathtaking backdrop for private jet customers. Dipping between the valleys, a Flexjet flight is both smooth and effortless, it is one of those rare experiences where you don't wish for the flight to end. The Flexjet Praetor 600 weaves between the snow covered mountains, appearing so close that you could reach out and touch it.

Flexjet customers can unwind at the Kempinski hotel, located in the heart of St. Moritz. This five-star hotel sits directly next to the Mauritius Springs, famous for its healing properties. Sharing its rich tradition since 1864, the Kempinski is primely located near to the action of the Snow Polo. Flexjet continues to ensure that its customers can enhance their luxury lifestyles beyond the cabin and around the world.

Deluxe Double Room starting from CHF 550 per night in the summer season

All prices include breakfast and tax. www.kempinski.com

By Alice Bradley

9H-KFX

Adventures in Sicily with Villatravellers

Think Sicily and, all too frequently, the images that spring to mind are hyperbolised nonsense, the stuff of film scripts. Entertaining in their own way, but not a patch on the dark fatalism, mixed with an odd but utterly charming humour, that characterises the Sicilian way - not to mention the stunning landscapes and irresistible cuisine.

It was, in my memory at least, at the turn of the century, when fate so conspired that a strong pound, a glut of budget airlines, and a UK presence in the EU enabled people to buy overseas property, whether for relocation or rental purposes. Sadly, despite the number of relevant magazines I read and television programmes I watched, the stars did not seem to align thus for me.

So when I arrived in Catania, Sicily, I wanted to fully immerse myself in the destination; to pretend, however childish that may seem, that this was my actual life. I didn't want a chain hotel with inoffensively bland decor: I wanted to be a local, at least for a weekend.

Villatravellers, a Sicilian villa company established in Palermo in 2006, makes this entirely possible, thanks to its founders' genuine desire to share their passion for the island and its culture, as well as to provide high-quality villa accommodation and exceptional customer service.

And 'exceptional customer service' is no exaggeration: unlocking the door to our first accommodation, the glorious Casale degli Erei Villa, near Ragusa, we found that the kitchen had been fully stocked with all of our dietary requirements in mind, and that we'd been provided with guidance on where to go and what to do, so as to live like a local without having to aimlessly 'peri peri' (the Sicilian expression for 'wandering around') Within our first day at the villa, we drank aperitivi in a square populated by garrulous old men and laughing school children, and witnessed, at close range, the UNESCO World Heritage Site Villa Romana del Casale, with its beautifully preserved mosaics dating back to the 4th century. We also, of course, wolfed down a traditional Sicilian dinner, prepared in-house by a chef.

Surrounded by vineyards and countryside, and housing nine bedrooms, Casale degli Erei Villa outdoor pool area is shaded by palms; in the poolhouse nearby, we could choose from a warming jacuzzi or a wine spa which, which allowed us to relax in a tub full of warmed wine. The polyphenols of wine are beneficial to skin radiance, but the treatment also has a sustainable edge, making use of end-of-season and surplus product: the owner of Casale degli Erei produces his own wines, and treated us to an informal poolside tasting.

We were determined to be involved, as well as indulged, however, so Villatravellers arranged a private cooking lesson for us, during which we got to spend time in the villa's spacious kitchen while a local expert taught us how to make a Sicilian meal, complete with pizza and cannoli from scratch.

Despite its relatively small size - Sicily is about one-fifth of the size of England - the island has an incredibly varied terrain, encompassing sparkling beaches and soaring mountains, volcanic landscapes, rows of prickly pears and rolling agricultural land. After spending two nights at Casale degli Erei, we travelled onwards to Sicily's northern side, a drive that had us glued to our windows for the views, presided over by Mt Etna, which was active as recently as November 2022.

In Cefalù, over which La Rocca Mountain looms, we hiked steep paths for a bird's eye view of the fishing village, a charming tangle of alleyways and traditional architecture, punctuated by the twin towers of a Norman

cathedral. Back at sea level, we rewarded ourselves with a seemingly never-ending lunch at waterside restaurant ITTICO, where platter after platter of fresh seafood appeared on the blue-checked-cloth table in front of us.

Our next Villatravellers property, Il Borgo de Barone, was originally constructed in the 17th century, and now perfectly blends antiquity and modernity. Built over three floors, its original olive press stone is a focal point of the entrance space, and after yet more food - again, thanks to Villatravellers arranging in-house dining - we each retired to one of the property's seven bedrooms. It was with a heavy sense of Sicilian fatalism that I fell asleep that night, knowing that tomorrow we would be heading home. 'Chiù nniuri ri mezzannotte nun pò fari', I thought to myself, sadly: it can't get any darker than midnight.

www.villatravellers.com

By Sarah Rodrigues

The Oberoi, Marrakech

A rare and precious haven from the pace of the Marrakech's vibrant centre, The Oberoi is a tranquil delight for all the senses

The tangle of passages and alleyways that characterise Marrakech's medina (old town) has been described as a labyrinth so frequently as to be a cliché – but the real riddle lies in the city's water supply, a riddle that was solved, thousands of years ago, by an ingenious system of irrigation –khettera - that channelled water from the oasis – the present day Palmeraie, also now known as the Beverly Hills of Marrakech - to the surrounding areas.

Without the existence of this clear, fluid, substance, and the alchemy that bent it to human will, Marrakech – like most cities – would never have been possible. It's a reality that's easily, even if only momentarily, suspended when we enter the shimmering mirage of the Oberoi.

With over 20 hotels and vessels located in destinations as exotic as Mauritius, India, Egypt, Indonesia and the UAE, the Oberoi chain, founded in 1934, is as synonymous with luxury as Cleopatra's bathing practices. Not that these – mythical tubs full of milk and honey – have much relevance here, where the decadence of bathing is a riot of sluicing, dunking and scrubbing – a series of ministrations far removed from the languorous, soothing strokes you've likely experienced on a spa day 'back home.'

As much as an authentic, as-locals-live, hammam should be experienced at least once during a stay in Marrakech, the Oberoi's 2000 sqm spa offers an unmissable alternative. Its watery setting – on its own island within the property's 28 acres - has, in itself, been thoughtfully conceived to reflect the significance of water in this setting: a significance as spiritual and cleansing as practical and hygienic.

Even if you're able to resist the allure of the range of treatments – both eastern and western in origin – at the Oberoi's spa, you'll never be far from the glisten of water: of the resort's 84 accommodations, 78 have private pools. The public spaces exert no less of a aqueous allure – not least the sight of the 240m-long canal, flowing through olive and citrus groves, and visible from the main courtyard, itself reflected in a glossy ornamental pool and inspired by the 14th century construction of one of Marrakech's most iconic monuments, Medersa Ben Youssef.

Thus inspired by both Moroccan and Andalusian architecture, the palatial nature of this initial introduction to the Oberoi is no mere nod to grandeur: it's more akin to prostration. Taking over 200 artisans more than two years to complete, its astonishingly ornate zellige walls gleam in the pale desert sunlight, while reflected ripples from the central pool dance across its surfaces. In the reception area, geometric patterns form an indecipherable wooden puzzle overhead. Soaring archways frame views of the grounds, with the Atlas Mountains discernible beyond. In this idyll of beauty and serenity, the crowds and noise of the medina, part traditional life, part tourist trap, seem inconceivably distant, yet are just 6 miles away.

Although time in Marrakech's souks is a key component to a visit to the city, it would be easy enough to while entire days away at the Oberoi. The communal pool, flanked by loungers and daybeds, is somewhat small for a property so large, (although the fact that most of the accommodations have private pools makes sense of this) but the adjoining restaurant, Azul, is a pleasant spot for a light lunch; when evening falls, fine dining and Moroccan specialties can be enjoyed – often with traditional musical accompaniment – at Siniman. That said, you could also be forgiven for spending long hours in your room, where decorative flourishes blend with decadent touches – either way, service, whether to your quarters or in the restaurants – is seamless. And, accustomed as you'll soon become to the lap of luxury, it will only make sense to explore the wonders of Marrakech comfortably ensconced in a vintage sidecar, thanks to an exclusive partnership between the Oberoi and sidecar outfit, Marrakech Insiders. Expertly guided by a skilled rider to little known corners of the city and its surrounds, you'll experience a Marrakech that not everyone is lucky enough to see – both within and beyond the walls of the Oberoi.

Fact Box

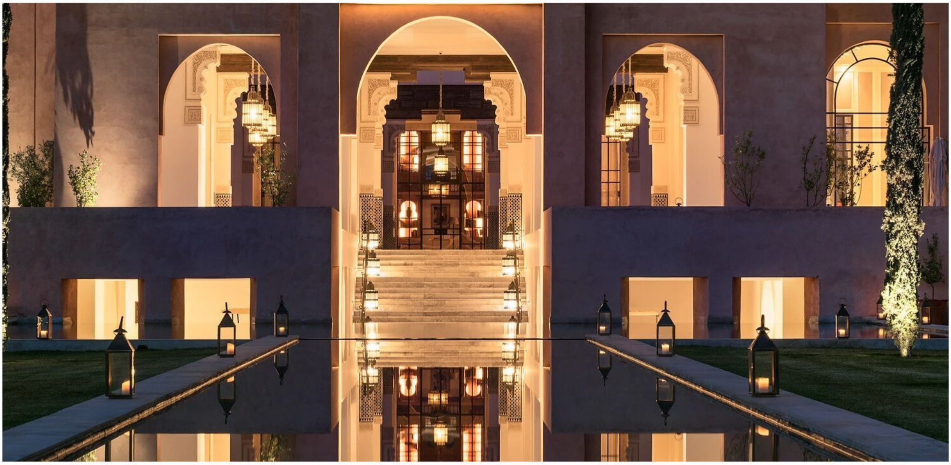
The Oberoi +212 525-081515; oberoihotels.com

Rooms from £709 per night for a Deluxe Room with Private Terrace incl 24-hr private butler service and B&B.

Marrakech Insiders, +212 (0)6 69 69 93 74, marrakechinsiders.com.

Rides from €175 for 1.5 hours, max 2 passengers.

By Sarah Rodrigues



Courmayeur Mont Blanc

On the Italian side of Mont Blanc (the sunnier side!) is Courmayeur Mont Blanc, an authentic alpine, luxury ski resort. We recently made our way up the snow-capped mountains and checked into the newly-renovated Gran Baita Hotel, offering one of the best locations and a boutique feel. After settling into our rooms, we took to a cosy snug beside a crackling fire in the atmospheric hotel bar, to cheers over aperol spritz and dive into an accompanying (first of many) charcuterie board. Floor-to-ceiling windows showcase the spectacular, mountainous scenery, whilst melodic piano music and laughter fills the room - what better way to start a trip?

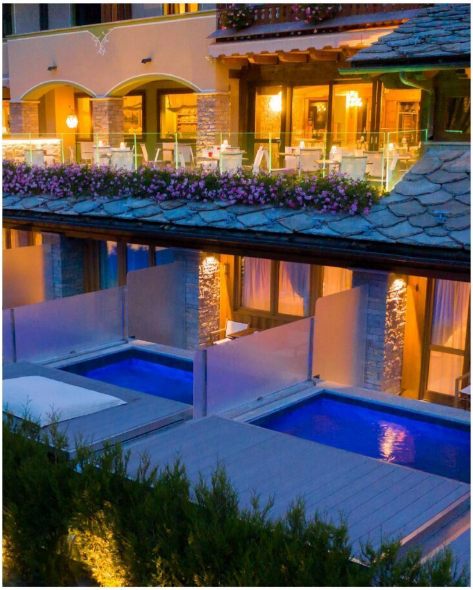
For our first evening in Courmayeur, we chose to dine at the hotel's own restaurant, Brasserie La Sapinière. The sophisticated and historic resort of Courmayeur offers a range of accommodation for all tastes and styles, for those staying elsewhere in the resort, Brasserie La Sapinière has a separate entrance to welcome visitors to dine in its intimate setting. The hotel's use of wood is reflective of traditional Italian alpine cabins, this interior is carried through into the restaurant. Indulge here in the hearty menu and local wine selection, we highly recommend the mouth-watering fried goats cheese starter with bell pepper jam, followed by a traditional chinois, perfect for sharing and socialising.

Start your mornings in the hotel's dining room to plan your day over breakfast and an Italian coffee, before heading out onto the freshly-powdered slopes. The hotel offers a free shuttle to the Dolonne cable car, making for a short and effortless trip up the mountains. Whilst some may travel with their ski equipment, we chose to hire all of our equipment from Ski Solutions ski hire, conveniently positioned near the top of the cable car. Renting with Ski Solutions made our trip even more comfortable, we did not have to carry a thing and felt reassured knowing everything was readily waiting for us. The staff here are very helpful; beginners and families in particular might appreciate this added assistance.

Courmayeur Mont Blanc's high-end ski offering includes 100 kilometres of slopes and off piste on two sides of the mountain. The resort welcomes experts and beginners alike, with plenty of variety to accommodate those at different levels. In addition, with pistes as high as 2755 meters and snow-making systems, there is always snow. The resort boasts the most incredible peaceful scenery and the famous Mont Blanc as your backdrop. For those looking for adrenaline-fuelled adventure, there is heliskiing, off-piste and cross-country skiing, as well as joy skating, dogsledding, fat biking, hiking, snowshoeing and climbing, ideal for non-skiers too. Those wanting additional guidance can make use of the ski and snowboard schools. It really is the dream destination for any traveller looking to experience adventure out in nature.

The après-ski scene in Courmayeur is sensational, there are plentiful ski-in / ski-out restaurants. We just couldn't resist pasta and tiramisu lunches out on the slopes at La Chaumière and Chateau Branlant. The restaurants are authentic and characterful, a perfect setting for locals and visitors to socialise over delicious alpine food, drinks and charcuterie boards, all rich in flavour. Courmayeur is a renowned gourmet hotspot, hosting an annual culinary month in March, known as Peak of Taste. During this time, culinary events take place across the resort as guests meet and eat at altitude with some of the most prolific chefs in the region, as well as a selection of world-class Michelin star chefs. Wine tastings and pairings also take place with fresh and local ingredients. After lunch, what better way to unwind than back at Hotel Gran Baita's incredible wellness spa? The spa offers guests the most memorable, magical spa experience. Relieve muscle aches in the unique sauna, with floor-to-ceiling windows that make you feel amongst the landscape. Step into the warmth of the pool and swim through sliding pool doors to make your way outside and be surrounded by sweeping mountainous scenery. Swimming under the blue sky, surrounded by bright-white, snow-covered mountains is an unforgettable experience. Additional facilities include a fitness area, relaxation room, steam room, facial / body treatments, manicure / pedicure and beauty services.

The centre of Courmayeur is just a 10-minute walk from the Gran Baita Hotel, here you will find a number of stylish boutiques, great bars and restaurants. La Bouche offers a mixology masterclass, an experience that is sure to exceed your expectations. Your talented and knowledgable host will invite you behind the bar to guide you in creating your own unique cocktail, artistically using delicate and versatile alpine ingredients. The masterclass is a lot of fun, making for a brilliant evening out before dinner. There are many restaurants to choose from both on and off the mountain. Whilst in the town, we tried Brasserie D'Entreves,



sharing delicious gnocchi, raclette and panacotta that melts in the mouth. Enjoy a more formal dinner at La Terrazza, where we highly recommend the steak with a decadent truffle and mushroom cream. Before ending your trip to head back home, you must make a final stop to visit Skyway Monte Bianco. This is a once in a lifetime experience that is much more than just a cable car. Be transported 3,466 meters up Europe's highest peak for breathtaking, 360-degree views of the alps, without having to put in any effort at all. Whilst there is the option to ski down from here, most opt to enjoy the restaurant, cafe, museum, exhibitions and shops before leisurely riding back down the mountain again. Courmayeur is rich in natural beauty throughout the year, in the summer months, you can expect a warmer climate and a wealth of outdoor activities. This year, the resort plans to introduce a new e-bike programme with cycling routes, as well as a 'Green Weekend' full of workshops and sports experiences such as yoga and a spectacular outdoor concert.

Fact Box

For more information visit: www.courmayeurmontblanc.it/en, call +39 0165 841612 or email info@courmayeurblanc.it.
7 nights at Gran Baita for two people on a half board basis in December 2023 from £1300 per person including flights and transfers with Ski Solutions.

By Klaudia Burton

Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort

St Lucia's renowned Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort has debuted a stunning new look following a multi-million pound renovation. The grand lobby area, with high-vaulted ceiling beams and an open-air concept, has unveiled an elegant new interior. Dramatic chandeliers, statement features and a mix of natural materials have enhanced the dynamic space, which has become the heart of the luxurious resort. The resort itself sits on Labrelotte Bay on the north-west coast of St Lucia, set in over 60 acres of lush hillside landscape, with undisturbed views across the Caribbean Sea. There are over 200 guest rooms and villas that offer guests a wide-range of accommodation types from beachfront suites with a private jacuzzi, to incredibly spacious estate villas perched further up the hillside, or be one of the first to stay in the new and incredibly contemporary ocean view residences. The resort's larger villas feature luxury amenities such as private infinity pools, terraces and full kitchens with the services of a dedicated chef available on request. Needless to say, all guest rooms and villas boast outstanding views of the ocean.

One way to spend your days at Windjammer Landing is to bask in the sun on the peaceful white sand beach, sipping on fresh coconuts or cocktails, tended to by the nearby bar, 96 Degrees. The crystal-clear Caribbean waters of Labrelotte Bay are particularly calm, ideal for a gentle swim or for sunbathing on a sea hammock as pelicans swoop down in the distance. For those more adventurous, just a short stroll along the bay are countless water sport activities, such as paddle boarding, kayaking and snorkelling. For families, the resort welcomes new family-friendly activities. This includes bubblemaker classes, designed to safely introduce children to the underwater world of scuba diving, as well as a chocolate making experience led by a local chocolatier, and a new family day at the spa package.

To explore the island beyond the bay, boats can whisk you away to tour the island by sea. We recommend Knotty Girl Boat Tours for a fun-filled day visiting well-known attractions like Marigot Bay, the mountainous Pitons and even to dip in the mud baths at Sulfur Springs. There are additional experiences offered at the resort by Windjammer Landing, such as guided painting classes or rum and chocolate tasting on the beach as the sun sets. Every Thursday evening, the resort showcases its very own carnival party on the beach. Friday nights see in the famous St Lucian street party known as the "jump up" in the locality of the resort for upbeat Caribbean music, dancing and authentic street food.

Windjammer Landing's spa and wellness facilities host an extensive range of services. Facilities include the steam room, relaxation room, gym with optional personal training and drinks bar. The drinks bar utilises local ingredients such as soursop, tamarind and sea moss, all of which are found on the island and are becoming increasingly popular for their many health benefits. This year, the spa also plans to unveil the island's first medi-spa featuring treatments at the forefront of anti-aging and rejuvenation. There are speciality wellness classes, one of which is hummingbird yoga that takes place in the setting of the resort's serene tropical gardens. In addition, the resort has created a unique programme combining wellness with breath-work and diving for the ultimate therapeutic underwater experience. Retreat to the sanctuary of the spa to indulge in one of the many massages or treatments available, or let the spa come to you with an in-villa massage.

Whilst there is the option of a private dining experience or a sunset beach picnic, the resort has a variety of restaurants for guests to choose from, all of which support St Lucia's local farmers and fishermen. 'Jammers' offers all-day beachside dining and local cuisine, whilst nearby 'Upper Deck' is a prestigious seafood and steak restaurant. Set further up the hillside with sweeping views of the bay is Italian restaurant, 'Papa Don's', ideal for families. New to the resort is 'Masala at Embers', serving the most delicious, authentic Indian cuisine. Whilst 'Embers' offers guests an additional laid-back beachfront dining option during the daytime. Windjammer Landing's signature restaurant, 'Dragonfly', is back serving breakfast and dinner having recently undergone an extensive

renovation. The restaurant now features a glamorous rooftop bar and lounge known as 'The Perch by Dragonfly'. The contemporary lounge is an extension of the seascape as the hand-painted murals invite the ocean into its interior. The hotspot sees locals and tourists alike socialising over innovative cocktails and menu offerings.
With all that Windjammer Landing has to offer, it is clear to see how the resort has achieved its excellent reputation. Locals and tourists proudly return to the resort year on year, welcomed back by the warm and friendly staff to escape to a home away from home in paradise.

Fact Box

Windjammer Landing Villa Beach Resort (www.windjammer-landing.com) offers rooms starting at £324/US$399 per night with villas starting at £471/US$581. For more information and reservations, visit www.windjammer-landing.com.

http://www.knottygirlboattours.com
IG and FB: @knottygirlboattours_slu Cost per adult is US$125.
STLA website http://www.stlucia.org

By Klaudia Burton

Bodysgallen Hall and Spa

As you to turn into the driveway at Bodysgallen Hall, you see your first glimpse of more than 200 acres of wooded parkland that secludes the historic hotel, and immediately you feel away from it all. Make your way through the heavy-set wooden door at the entrance of the Grade I listed, 17th century country house and enter into one of several, atmospheric lounge areas with a crackling fire at the centre.

Bodysgallen Hall comprises of 31 rooms and suites, 15 of which are in the main house, with a further 16 cottages set amongst the grounds. We stayed in the main house; we were pleasantly surprised by the spaciousness of the room and overjoyed at the sight of a magnificent view. The view looks out over the award-winning gardens towards Conwy Castle and the picturesque mountains of Snowdonia. The room is charming and characterful, an original stone window makes the perfect frame for the outstanding view.

Once settled into the room, we were eager to explore the historic gardens before sunset. Make your way through beautiful walled gardens containing box hedges, colourful spring flowers and water features. Venture slightly further to find a small tower ruin with a spiral staircase that offers yet another wonderful vantage point. As the fresh country air helps you to work up an appetite, look forward to a traditional 3-course meal in the romantic setting of Bodysgallen Hall's Dining Room restaurant, awarded 3 AA Rosettes. The fine dining menu is adapted over the seasons and includes organic produce grown in Bodysgallen's own gardens; we enjoyed the juiciest forest berries alongside our dark chocolate mousse dessert. The dining room welcomes guests back for breakfast, offering a full Welsh cooked breakfast made with locally sourced ingredients as well as a continental option alongside this.

With a full day ahead to discover all that Bodysgallen Hall has to offer, you might find yourself venturing back out into nature for a woodland walk. We followed the map provided in our room and continued up to the nearby Obelisk. Here, we found breathtaking views of the River Conwy spilling out into the Irish Sea, where the shore wraps around the coast beneath you. We sat here for a moment to take it all in and appreciate the peaceful scenery, before taking the long route back to Bodysgallen Hall, deliberately getting lost in the enchanting woodland to continue to marvel at the never-ending views.

Bodysgallen Hall's Afternoon Tea has an excellent reputation, guests can indulge in this luxurious treat in either the oak-panelled hall, drawing room or library. We retreated to the intimate library, decorated in rich colours with stain glass features, cosying up on a plush sofa in front of our own log fire. A range of finger sandwiches, freshly baked plain and fruit scones with clotted cream and jam, as well as cakes, pastries and traditional Welsh bara brith is presented on a 3-tier plate. The selection offers a very good choice of both savoury and sweet treats, with a thoughtful Welsh touch. It really is the most perfect setting for a memorable afternoon tea experience.

Just a short walk from the hotel, Bodygallen Spa is open daily to both hotel guests and day guests, we found an evening in the spa to be the perfect way to unwind. The spa houses a large indoor swimming pool as well as a spa bath, sauna, steam room, gymnasium, club room, relaxation room and six treatment rooms where a range of beauty and well-being treatments are also available. For visits during summer months, you can enjoy views of Deganwy Castle from the comfort of the club room and sun terrace or sunbathe in the secluded sun garden next to the pool. There is also a croquet lawn in the grounds and several golf courses in the locality of the hotel.

If you have time to discover the local area, Bodysgallen Hall is only a short drive from the Victorian seaside town of Llandudno, where you can dip your toes in the sea at North Shore Beach and take a walk along the 19th-century Pier. A brilliant afternoon can also be spent at Conwy Castle, where you can walk the walls of the 700-year-old fortress and even spot Bodysgallen Hall nestled into the hillside in the distance before you.

Visit: https://www.bodysgallen.com/

By Klaudia Burton

Hartwell House

For a romantic short break or for quality time with family or friends, Hartwell House is an ideal choice offering elegant accommodation, fine dining, and a spa.

Now National Trust owned, and one of three historic houses where the public can stay, this Grade I listed property stands in over 90 acres of gardens and parkland and is easy to reach being just forty miles north west of London, in Buckinghamshire, and less than an hour from Oxford, Blenheim Palace and other key places of interest to visit including the Chiltern Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with miles of footpaths rambling through beech-wood forests and alongside momentous waterways such as the Thames and Grand Union Canal, and also the Vale of Aylesbury, one of the most beautiful parts of the county.

Hartwell House has an illustrious history. The most famous resident was Louis XVIII, exiled King of France. In 1809, Hartwell House was leased to the king and his court, and he remained at Hartwell until 1814 when the constitutional document confirming his accession to the throne was signed in the library by the King. In 1938 the house and estate were acquired by Ernest Cook, an early hero of the conservation movement.

An elegant and majestic house, Hartwell features both Jacobean and Georgian facades, contains numerous beautiful rooms with rococo ceilings, antique furniture, and paintings, yet has every contemporary comfort.

There are a host of elegant bedrooms and suites, each individually designed in a traditional country house style, with antiques and fine paintings. The main Dining Room has been designed in the style of the eminent early 19th century architect, Sir John Soane.

The restaurant has been awarded two AA Rosettes. Hartwell Spa in the grounds has a mosaic-lined indoor swimming pool, sauna and steam rooms, gym and café. Hartwell Court, originally the eighteenth-century coach house and situated approximately 100 yards from the house, has been restored to provide additional bedrooms.

Arriving at Hartwell is a treat, with a sweeping driveway leading to a statue, and the front of the house, with huge imposing doors leading to a majestic interior. After a warm welcome, we were shown to our gorgeous suite, with large bedroom, bathroom, and separate sitting room – all with wonderful garden views. One of the first things we noticed is the very unusual main staircase which is decorated with all sorts of heraldic and chivalric figurines. You can almost imagine them coming to life after dark!

We enjoyed a wonderful afternoon tea in one of the light, airy and beautifully decorated drawing rooms, followed by an excellent dinner, plus a spa experience and aromatherapy facial and massage on the following day.

There are plenty of other things to do though, including Walk the Tree Guide to explore the many trees across all 94 acres Hartwell House's gardens which were landscaped by a contemporary of Capability Brown. You can also enjoy a game of tennis or croquet, escape to the impressive library and nestle down with a good book by the fire and enjoy a relaxing treatment at the spa.

An elegant, luxurious yet welcoming place to stay – full of history, charm and excellent staff who do their very best to make you feel at home.

www.hartwell-house.com

Hartwell House, Buckinghamshire, HP17 8NR

B&B is priced from £265 at Hartwell House based on a double room with two guests. This also includes use of the spa facilities.

www.historichousehotels.com

Middlethorpe Hall

Just a few miles from York sits beautiful Middlethorpe Hall - the only country house hotel in this history-rich city, and the perfect base to enjoy the majestic scenery of Yorkshire and the many fascinating visitor attractions this very special place has to offer too.Looking like something from a Jane Austen novel, Middlethorpe Hall stands in 20 acres of award-winning gardens and was formerly the home of the famous 18th century diarist Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. There are 29 bedrooms, an award-winning restaurant and boutique spa.

On arrival, we were warmly greeted by helpful front of house staff and an incredibly helpful porter who knew everything about the Hall's history and surrounding area too. Each of the bedrooms at Middlethorpe Hall is individually designed and has its own distinct story. Ours was a delight with a cosy adjoining sitting room, with large sash windows affording lovely views out across the lawns. There were lots of thoughtful touches such as a vase of fresh Spring flowers, refreshments tray, sweet treats on arrival and luxury toiletries.

The public rooms at the Hall are stunning. A large sweeping staircase leads to the bedrooms and below are the elegant dining room and large sitting and drawing rooms where we were treated to a delectable traditional afternoon tea of warm, fresh-out-of-the-oven scones, artisan pastries and an array of dainty sweet treats, accompanied by a glass of bubbly and wide choice of quality teas. It's clearly very popular with locals and fellow tourists alike as the rooms were quickly filled with couples and small groups of friends all thoroughly enjoying afternoon tea in such an elegant yet comfortable setting.

A gentle stroll around the large gardens was needed after and a very enjoyable hour was spent meandering around the walled gardens, wild daffodil and snowdrop fringed parkland and lawns – all affording lovely views. Some accommodation is available outside of the main house too – in several pretty courtyard cottages. After relaxing in the room, it was soon time for a cocktail or two before moving in to the classically panelled dining room - the perfect setting to enjoy the contemporary take on traditional British food. The restaurant has been awarded two AA Rosettes and our meal and accompanying wine were excellent, and service impeccable.

The following morning, we enjoyed a super breakfast, and then made the most of our last few hours enjoying Middlethorpe Hall's own small spa which has a pool, sauna, and peaceful upstairs treatment rooms - the perfect place to unwind and recharge with treatments by Aromatherapy Associates. The signature rose facial was wonderful and incredibly relaxing. Middlethorpe Hall is a perfect place to stay for a romantic break, weekend or mid-week escape with family and friends. We highly recommend. B&B is priced from £245 at Middlethorpe Hall – based on a double room with two guests. This also includes use of the spa facilities.
www.middlethorpe.com
www.historichousehotels.com

Star Flyer Leeward Island Adventure

A soft sea breeze, spectacular sunset, champagne and good company – just the end of another unforgettable day on board Star Flyer, on what has to be the perfect sailing adventure.

We marvelled at the Eastern Mediterranean last time Star Clipper style, and now embarked on a new journey to skim the perfect pirate shores of the beautiful Leeward Islands. A collection of verdant lush peaks rising out of the deep, guarded by pods of dolphin and roaming whales, St Barts, St Maarten, Guadeloupe, Antigua, Dominica and Nevis are some of the Caribbean's most precious jewels and all ports visited on our joyful journey on Star Clipper's sister ship, Star Flyer.

If you're yet to be acquainted, Star Flyer is one of three most majestic true clipper ships from Star Clippers. Star Flyer is Star Clipper's twin, and Royal Clipper its larger and grander cousin. Think towering masts, billowing sails – and in simplistic terms, maybe even Pirates of the Caribbean (in an altogether far less dangerous way!)

Elegant & Majestic True Clipper Ship

Whilst the ships may look at first glance like something from a swashbuckling maritime period film, they are modern cruise ships in every way, where the traditions of the past are happily married to the comforts and amenities of the present day.

Created for luxury-appreciating passengers who also love the traditions and romance of the legendary era of sailing ships, Star Flyer is 115 metres long and carries just 166 guests in pampered comfort. Life aboard is blissfully relaxed, much like travelling on a private yacht.

This elegant ship offers spacious accommodation and expansive teak decks with ample space and two swimming pools. In fact, you'll find Star Flyer and her siblings offer more outdoor space per passenger than most conventional cruise ships.

Arriving at the port of Philipsburg, St Maarten, and seeing Star Flyer again really is something special. Supremely elegant and majestic, she's a beautiful sight to behold. Following a smooth embarkation, and warm greeting by the fantastic crew, it was time to explore.

After marvelling at the deck and noting all the perfect places to sunbathe, dolphin watch, and enjoy a cocktail or three at the deck bar, we stepped inside. The decor of Star Flyer is reminiscent of the grand age of sail. Antique prints and paintings of famous sailing ships please your eye, while teak and gleaming mahogany rails are richly remindful of Star Clippers' proud nautical heritage.

Food

Walking past the inside bar area and cosy lounge with a mini-grand piano, you descend to the delightful light and airy dining room where you take all your meals. All Star Clippers' ships feature open-seating dining. Here you can choose to dine as a couple or share a table with others – something most people do, and we are so pleased we did as actually we made the acquaintance of two wonderful couples really made our time on board extra special. We enjoyed onshore excursions with them and evening drinks and kept in touch. They then actually booked this same Leeward Islands trip on Star Flyer as us and it was such fun to enjoy this new adventure with them. In fact, the vast proportion of Star Clippers' clientele book time and time again... many co-ordinating trips with friends they met on board. It's one of the key things that make sailing adventures on Star Clipper ships so incredibly special.

Meals are excellent and it's quite astonishing how the chef and teams produce such a wonderful array of tasty dishes day after day. They really do make dining aboard a delightful culinary adventure with an international menu of foods from the corners of the Earth. From waking up, you can help yourself to a coffee and continental breakfast with Parisian croissants or sweet Danish pastries. Or you can savour a full breakfast with fresh tropical fruit and crisp bacon, grilled sausage and omelettes cooked to order in the dining room. At lunch, a marvellous buffet of seafood, salads and grilled favourites awaits your pleasure, and sometimes you can indulge in an outdoor barbecue on shore. And, in the evening, the pretty dining room becomes the setting for the chef's finest culinary presentations, designed to please the eye and the palate, complemented by a selection of fine wines. The service is excellent – friendly and gracious, and most nights there is a different theme, so you don't get bored of the same food night after night.

Each teatime, most guests head on deck to the indoor-outdoor Tropical Bar for cocktails and canapes and a range of tasty snacks, and to enjoy the musical entertainment and catch up on the day's events. This bar is the place to head after dinner too, for more music, dancing and fun entertainment enjoyed by all.

Accommodation

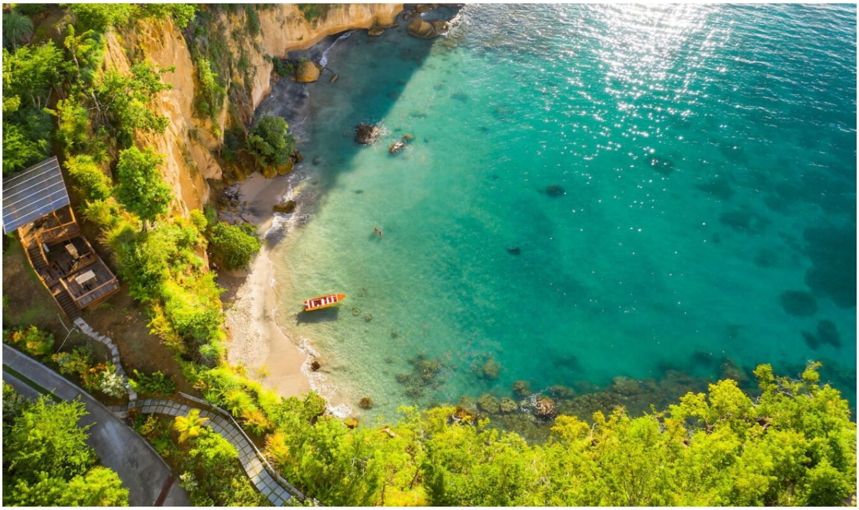
Cabin wise, there's a good choice of categories, and all are cleverly designed to maximise every inch of space, and far more comfortable than you might expect on a ship such as this. Some categories even have a whirlpool bath and cabin doors opening right out on to the deck. All have their own bathroom with shower, flat screen TV and most other mod cons you could wish for.

To do

Star Clippers offers a wide range of exciting itineraries to choose from. Ours was to explore the beautiful Leeward Islands. The Caribbean has long been synonymous with words such as paradise, bliss and heaven-on-earth, and there is a very good reason for this. Each region and island has its own character and appeal – but all are blessed with soft golden or exotic dark volcanic sands, clean turquoise seas and lush green lands – plus a warm climate all year round.

Star Clippers always offers a super choice of excursions and activities across all its routes – and this one was no exception. Guest could choose from everything from zip-lining, to snorkelling, incredible nature safaris, kayaking, snorkelling with stingrays, rainforest canopy tours, river tubing adventures, waterfall hikes and more. These all proved incredibly popular and every day guests were off and out and about. You can of course just stay on board and sunbathe, make use of the two pools, read and relax, or combine this with a leisurely tender ride to the nearest harbour for a spot of lunch and a harbourside walk. Tenders run to and from the ship frequently each day whilst it is at anchor so you can come and go as you please.

Whilst on board, when the sea is very calm and weather good, the crew often open up the opportunity to climb the mast. Not for those fearful of heights but on our trip many tried this – including one brave gent who celebrated his 80th birthday with a bold climb to the top! Also each day there's a fascinating maritime talk to enjoy and generally other activities such as yoga to make the most of.



Star Clipper Leeward Islands Adventure

Our Leeward Islands Journey

Philipsburg, St. Maarten

The smallest island in the world shared by two countries, St. Martin/St. Maarten is a mecca for mega yachts, and just as big on shopping. Whether you go Dutch in Philipsburg or prefer Marigot's chic French style there's something for everyone. It is quite busy though so if it's peace and quiet you desire, one of the other islands is probably a good option for you.

Charlestown, Nevis

For a welcome slower pace and very pretty scenery, Nevis never fails to charm. The island is dotted with old sugar plantations, some of them now turned into quaint inns, many with interesting histories. Dominated by the perilously steep cliffs of Mt. Scenery, this small Dutch island didn't even have a road around it until 1951. It's known for excellent diving and snorkelling. The Four Seasons resort here is a must, enjoying an enviable position on a spectacular golden sand beach.

Iles des Saintes

This was such a treat, as our Star Flyer home joined her big sister Royal Clipper at sea just South of Iles des Saintes on her journey from the Windward Islands. We had a thrilling race and all passengers were up on deck to see if Royal could beat us and take photos of this most majestic beauty gliding by.

Cabrits, Dominica

Dominica (not to be mistaken with the Dominican Republic) is a firm favourite of ours. It's incredibly pretty with towering mountains covered in wild tropical forest, dropping to a plethora of beautiful beaches, quaint small towns, plantations and secret coves. There's plenty to see and do here – including gliding through a steamy orchid-festooned rainforest on a fascinating boat ride or hiking to the breath-taking Trafalgar Falls and a bubbling lake. We spent the day at Secret Bay – a stunning, small, super-luxe resort nestled in the hillsides around a pretty cove, with amazing bay views.

Terre-de-Haut, Iles des Saintes

We anchored off shore between this very pretty group of tiny islands lying just off Guadeloupe. Star Flyer guests enjoyed tender trips out to the nearby superb beaches, snorkelling, diving and other watersports on offer.

Deshaies, Guadeloupe

Such a spectacular island, Guadeloupe looks like a butterfly from the air. Its giant wings are actually two islands, separated by the Rivière Salée, a natural salt water channel. Basse Terre, the southern or leeward part of Guadeloupe, is lush and rugged, dominated by La Soufrière - a stream of boiling water which gushes from the top of the 4,800-ft. mountain, reminding you that this volcano is not dormant, but very much alive.

Falmouth Harbour, Antigua

History rich, this large island is famous for its historic dockyards, marinas, old inns and convivial crowds of sun-tanned yacht crews, and is known as the epicentre of the Caribbean yachting world. Today, every faded pink brick and weather-worn bollard of Nelson's Dockyard evokes the presence of the greatest naval commander in history – but there are also wonderful beaches, pretty scenery and lively towns to explore. We spent the day at the excellent Royalton Antigua luxury resort which is in an enviable location next to a truly stunning golden sand beach. The resort even has Maldives-esque over water villas with private pools, and guests can enjoy a private cabana with own pool close to the beach and super cocktails and food on tap.

Gustavia, St Barts

World famous as the Winter destination of choice for every A-Lister and billionaire, St Barts is a mecca for the mega-rich and it's easy to see why. Compact, very pretty with elegant small towns such as the capital Gustavia, it's blessed with excellent hotels, duty-free shopping in exquisite boutiques, beautiful beaches, excellent dining and more. The harbour was full of many of the world's most expensive superyachts whilst we visited – quite the spectacle!

Philipsburg, St Maarten

We returned to St Maarten, very sad to be leaving our ship and its wonderful crew and all the new friends we made from across the world. But.. we hope to be back on board soon.

So much more than just a cruise

If the thought of being on one of those huge cruise ships with thousands of others leaves you rather cold, a Star Clipper sailing adventure is the perfect alternative. It couldn't be more different – in all the absolute best ways.

As I wrote before, there are holidays you enjoy, and then those you remember for years to come. You know, those extra special ones where the stars aligned and everything was just right – the weather, the people, the ambiance, and the food? For this very reason, guests on Star Clipper ships return time and time again, as they know they will always leave with memories to cherish, friendships renewed, and new connections made.

Fact Box

7 nights Star Flyer Leeward Islands voyage from 25th November 2023 – From circa £2,085 per person 2 sharing depending on chosen route for a Class 2 cabin. Flights/ transfers not included.
Website: https://starclippers.co.uk/
Reservations: 0845 200 6145
Email: Sales@starclippers.co.uk

Four Seasons Nevis

Nevis is one of the most unspoilt and relaxing islands in the Caribbean. Lush and green with amazing beaches, quaint small towns, and a slow pace of life that encourages you to stop and appreciate all the natural beauty around you. It's a very special place that's full of charm and the easy-going genuineness of its people and is the perfect destination to fully relax and unwind and reconnect with loved ones and friends.

It's the smaller of two islands comprising the nation of Saint Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean famous for stunning sandy beaches, fascinating maritime history and connections with Nelson, and also for its mountainous tropical forest interior and warm hospitality.

It's just 36 square miles in size and unlike some other Caribbean islands, there are no large cruise-ship ports, no traffic lights, no fast-food restaurants, and even no buildings taller than a coconut tree. It's on this lovely island you'll find the wonderful Four Seasons Nevis resort, conveniently located just minutes from the cultural hub of downtown Charlestown, yet offering peace and seclusion, plus a raft of memorable experiences on both land and sea.

A true embodiment of the spirit and soul of the Caribbean, this elegant beachfront oasis is everything you could wish for from a luxury getaway. This five star luxury resort features first class accommodation, a range of excellent dining and bar options, golf and a number of very attractively presented swimming pools, some fringed by cabanas to relax in when you want a little shade. It's located right on a stunning long pristine golden sand beach which is ideal for swimming, sunbathing, paddleboarding and snorkelling – or just for taking a romantic stroll on at sunset.

Everything you'd expect from a highly acclaimed Four Seasons resort, in a most wonderful location.

https://www.fourseasons.com/nevis

Royalton Antigua

Located in an enviable position fringing a pristine private beach overlooked by the historic Fort Barrington, Royalton Antigua, An Autograph Collection All-Inclusive Resort & Casino, offers discerning travellers a seamless holiday experience, with fine dining at oceanfront restaurants, stylish architecture, and the island's only overwater bungalows.

It's one of the very few resorts outside of the Maldives that offers over water villas with private pools too. The adults-only Chairman's Overwater Bungalows offer the ultimate in tropical luxury, with a world-class butler service, infinity plunge pools and overwater hammocks to bask in picture-perfect sunsets, and in-room extras such as romantic dinners and a private mixology service. Elsewhere, elegantly styled suites open out to stunning views of the bay, complete with signature DreamBed ™ mattresses, rain showers and some even with semi-private swim-out pools. A wide range of restaurants serve the likes of local Caribbean classics, Italian comfort food, and steakhouse fare, with a reservation-free dining concept. Foodies can also savour a seven-course C/X Culinary Experience with a private chef, with each dish enhanced by musical selections.

Families will love the on-site splash park, non-motorised water sports such as kayaking, snorkelling, and introductory scuba diving lessons, daily and nightly entertainment, and dedicated clubs for both kids and teens. Guests also can bliss out at The Royal Spa or keep fit with the likes of yoga and Zumba etc.

Couples seeking to rekindle the romance can stroll the pristine beach, cosy up under a palapa for two, or savour a candlelit beach dinner. And for those dreaming of exchanging vows on white-sand shores under an elegant beach gazebo, Royalton Antigua's dedicated wedding planners can make it happen. Elevate the experience further with an upgrade to Diamond Club™, which includes a private butler service, an exclusive pool and beach area, preferential restaurant reservations and drinks selections, and the best rooms on property.

We were lucky to visit the resort and enjoyed a wonderful day experiencing one of their super pool-side private cabanas. These are located in the exclusive Diamond Club™ area and featured their own plunge pool and lovely views down to the gorgeous golden sand beach below with crystal clear water perfect for snorkelling and swimming.

The resort's hospitality was second to none and every effort was made to make us feel welcome. We'd love to return for longer next time!

Stay at Royalton Antigua, An Autograph Collection All-Inclusive Resort & pCasino from $360 (approx.£295) per person per night in a Luxury Junior Suite.

Visit: https://all-inclusive.marriott.com/royalton-antigua/

Secret Bay, Dominica

A true hidden gem, Secret Bay in the beautiful Caribbean Island of Dominica is a high luxury sanctuary to soothe mind, body, and soul.

Nestled around tropical forest covered clifftops fringing a pretty cove, the resort is fast becoming the go to place for the world's most discerning travellers weary of tourist hoards. It features a collection of architecturally stunning secluded and sustainably crafted villas that are immersed in nature and positioned on a breath-taking clifftop overlooking the azure Caribbean Sea.

This six-star, all-villa, Relais & Châteaux rainforest resort and residences is is now accepting guest reservations for its new Clifftop Multi-Villa Estates for stays beginning June 2023. Situated on the crest of the promontory's 200-foot cliff with expansive views of the Caribbean Sea and access to three swimmable and secluded beaches, the Clifftop Multi-Villa Estates are architectural masterpieces thoughtfully tucked among the trees and natural landscape, reaffirming Secret Bay's commitment to environmental preservation. Each Clifftop Estate features two villas, thoughtfully sited so that each has expansive views and ultimate privacy and seclusion.

Secret Bay has also announced an array of new amenities, including a hillside funicular, garden-to-fork chef's table experience, elevated decks, art gallery and a kombucha brewery. The new villas, Clifftop enclave and amenities are being introduced as part of the award-winning resort's multi-year master plan. This evolution – spread over 40+ acres of coastal land – allows for an array of new amenities, more private villas, and the for-sale residence programme, all while lowering the resort's overall density and providing uninterrupted peace and space.

Perched atop an ultra-private promontory, located more than 200 feet above sea level, the new Clifftop Multi-Villa Estates are enveloped in nature with expansive views of the Caribbean Sea. The first comprises Secret Bay's iconic Zabuco Villa and popular Ti-Fèy Villa designs, and collectively features three-bedrooms and four bathrooms. The two villas within the compound can be booked separately for a couple's getaway or together for family and friends travelling as a group. Meanwhile, designed to be booked together, the renowned Zabuco Honeymoon Villa is accompanied by the newly designed Mapou Cottage, which can be used as an alternative studio or relaxation space, as well as private family or friends' accommodation.

Each villa within the Villa Estates is appointed with a gourmet kitchen, an in-nature private plunge pool, stylish bathrooms with rain showers and soaking tubs, and hand-crafted indoor furnishings.

A beautiful peaceful super-luxe resort you'll not want to leave.

Standard rates for the new Clifftop Multi-Villa Estates start at US $3,324/night plus taxes for up to six people. The Clifftop Ti-Fèy Villa and Zabuco Villa can be booked separately and start at US $1,213/night plus taxes.

Visit: https://secretbay.dm/villa/multi-villa-estates/

Gili Lakanfushi

If you're keen to escape the city, catch some sunshine, and enjoy some much-needed R&R, Gili Lakanfishu is an ideal vacation choice. Rightly famous for being one of the Maldives' most luxurious resorts, this multi-award-winning tropical paridise offers the perfect combination of pristine white sand beaches, world class cuisine, eco initiatives and exceptional villas...some of which can only be reached by boat.

Unlike many Maldives resorts which are only accessable by a domestic or weather-dependant sea plane journey, Malé International Airport is just a 20 min speedboat sail away from the Gili. This makes it perfectly positioned for those who want to reach their luxury resort as soon as possible after their long international flight.

From the moment you arrive on this tiny, private coral island resort, you'll feel the pressures of everyday life slip away. We were met by our very own Mr Friday, our butler for the duration of our stay, who offered us a cooling spritz of peppermint spray and ferried us by boat to our large, luxury Crusoe Residence, complete with over-water sundeck and rooftop terrace. We spent lazy days basking on our spacious multi-tiered sundeck, dipping in to the crystal clear lagoon or retreating to the air conditioned large living room and bedroom whenever we wanted to escape the heat. These villas are exceptional – and among the largest you'll find in the Maldives and so much thought has been given to their design. Entirely private too – being only accessible by boat, and peaceful, with just the calls of very cute white terns and gentle slosh of the sea to disturb your peace.

When you can tear yourself away from your fabulous villa, you simply call your Mr Friday, who will come to collect you by boat, and in to the island you head to enjoy its many delights.

At breakfast, we feasted on French toast and freshly-squeezed tropical smoothies, chose light lunches of island-grown salads and locally caught fresh fish and seafood, and treated ourselfs in the evening dining across the range of excellent dining options – including our favourite, the excellent Japanese fushion restaurant, By the Sea.

If you'd prefer some privacy, you can also dine in your own villa — but we didn't get the opportunity as we were too busy exploring the chilled underground wine cellar, where you slip a hot water bottle under your feet as sommeliers guide you through food and wine pairings, followed by the subterranean Chocolate and Cheese Rooms, where you can sample handmade chocolates and artisanal cheeses.

It's impossible to resist the allure of the clear turquoise waters, so we took advantage of the breathtaking scenery and went snorkelling among black-tipped sharks and turtles. You can also go scuba diving, windsurfing, or learn to surf — the biggest break in the Maldives is just 15 minutes from the resort. If you'd rather go island hopping, board a yacht to take a cruise through remote atolls, or get a taste of authentic Maldivian life when you visit local islands.

There are plenty of other unique experiences on offer, so it's easy to make your holiday dreams come true. Whether you want to find inner peace in the overwater Meera Spa, where you can try the four-handed massage or experience a Tibetan singing bowl session, or do your bit to protect the environment when you sign up for a data-collecting science dive, you'll find it's easy to switch off and enjoy a truly luxurious retreat.

Gili Lakanfushi is such a wonderful antidote to the stresses and strains of corporate life. For jaw-dropping incredible natural beauty, super-luxurious accommodation, gourmet cuisine, peace and tranquility we can't think of anywhere more perfect to relax and recharge. We guarantee you'll want to return, again... and again.... As their website says it's all about 'Luxury your own way, and your own pace'. They beleive when it comes to luxury, there's no such thing as one size fits all and that's why they give their guests the freedom to design their dream getaway, whether they seek quality time with loved ones, an escape from reality, or a thrilling range of aquatic adventures. From experience, we can testify, they really do go above and beyond to exceed expectations and personalise every encounter, allowing every guest to make the most of their precious time here. A very special resort.

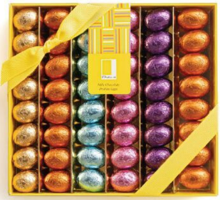
Visit: https://gili-lankanfushi.com/

Gili Lakanfushi, Maldives Para

dise

Faustino VII
RIOJA

GRAHAM BECK
BRUT ROSÉ



MOM
LOVE
GOD SAVE THE GIN
DISTILLED GIN

Freixenet
ITALIAN ROSÉ

MINUTY
PRESTIGE

Faustino I
GRAN RESERVA
RIOJA

Charbonnel et Walker
Established 1875
MILK SEA SALT CARAMEL TRUFFLES
Milk chocolate truffles with a caramel and sea salt centre lightly dusted in icing sugar
245g e 8.6oz
One, The Royal Arcade, 28 Old Bond Street, London

...melt...
LONDON

melt...
LONDON

Where to Buy

Columba from Badiani Gelato - Classica £28 & Dark Chocolate £30 from www.badiani1932.com
Luxury Belgian Chocolate's Hearts Selection Gift Box, £35 www.farhi.co.uk
Bonbonniere's filled with chocolate covered almonds, raisins, coffee beans, crystalised ginger, £15 & £25, www.farhi.co.uk
Faustino I Gran Reserva Rioja Asda, Tesco, and Ocado £15
Faustino VII Rosé Asda - £5.50
Coconut Egg £34.99 from MELT Chocolates https://meltchocolates.com/
Strawberry Vegan Egg £34.99 from MELT Chocolates https://meltchocolates.com/
Emmiline Spring bouquet from Love Delivered £32.50 www.lovedelivered.co.uk
Coconut Egg £34.99 MELT Chocolates https://meltchocolates.com/
Strawberry Vegan Egg £34.99 MELT Chocolates https://meltchocolates.com/
Freixenet Italian Sparkling Rosé RRP £9 | Slurp, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose
Graham Beck Brut Rosé NV RRP £15.99 | Majestic
MOM LOVE GIN RRP from £23.36 | Master of Malt, thedrinkshop, Amazon, Ocado
Minuty Prestige Rose 105 Euros https://en.minuty.com/products/prestige-rose
Salladore Rose from Marlo https://marlo.wine/products/2022-selladore-rose?_pos=4&_sid=8de4da404&_ss=r
Charbonnel Et Walker – Milk Chocolate Truffles with Caramel and Sea Salt, £19.99 www.wholefoodsmarket.co.uk
Cocoba Chocolate Milk Easter Egg Sprinkle Vegan, £12.99 www.wholefoodsmarket.co.uk
Milk Chocolate Praline Foiled Eggs, 370g £17.50 www.farhi.co.uk

SELLADORE
EN PROVENCE
MARLO

Images credit: Roman Odinstov - Pexels

Easter Gift & Celebration Guide

Coronation Celebrations

Our selection of fine food & wine offerings fit for a king

BIRD & BLEND TEA CO.
DECKCHAIR DREAMING
PEPPY MINT
DOZY GIRL
DEEP BREATHS
MOMENT OF CALM SELECTION BOX

THE CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III

A ROYAL BREW-BILEE

SAVOIA AMERICANO ROSSO
CHAMPAGNE TAITTINGER Reims
PRESTIGE ROSÉ

MOËT & CHANDON

GRAHAM BECK
RIDGEVIEW BLOOMSBURY
GRAFFIGNA Reserve MALBEC

CHAPEL DOWN ROSÉ BRUT
CHAPEL DOWN BRUT NV

QUINTA DA PEDRA ALTA

HAND COOKED CORONATION CHICKEN

QUINTA DA PEDRA ALTA
LAFAGE
HAYMANS OF LONDON LONDON DRY GIN

Coronation Celebration Hamper with Prosecco £120 www.marksandspencer.com

Biscuiteers Coronation Celebration Hamper £145 https://www.biscuiteers.com/biscuits/the-coronation-celebration-hamper

Coronation Celebration Hamper £160 https://www.cartwrightandbutler.co.uk/coronation-celebration-hamper

Finest Teas from https://www.birdandblendtea.com/

Haymans Gin www.haymansgin.com/

Ridgeview award winning sparkling wine www.ridgeview.co.uk/

Chapel Down Wines www.chapeldown.com

Savoia Americano Rosso https://casa-savoia.com/prodotto/

Taittinger Rose https://www.taittinger.com/en/prestige-rose

Graham Beck https://grahambeck.com/

Graffigna Reserve Malbec www.sainsburys.co.uk

Miraflors 2022 Domain Lafage www.vinatis.co.uk

Quinta da Pedra Alta Reserva Tinto 2018 https://ndjohn.co.uk/

Quinta da Pedra Alta 10 Year Old Tawny Port https://wine-republic.co.uk/

Image credit: Pexels, Karolina Grabows

The Scent of Spring

From romantic soft florals to memorable evening scents, these are our top choices for Spring

PRADA
MILANO

GUCCI
FLORA
GORGEOUS JASMINE
EAU DE PARFUM

DREAM
edeniste

ISSEY MIYAKE
L'EAU
D'ISSEY
PIVOINE
EAU DE TOILETTE INTENSE

DANSE
ÉTOILÉE
EAU DE PARFUM
GRACE DE MONACO

NOMADE
JASMIN NATUREL
INTENSE
Chloé

MUSC NOIR ROSE
narciso rodriguez
for her

Gucci Flora Gorgeous Jasmine 100ml EDP from www.theperfumeshop.com

Issey Miyake L'Eau d'Issey Pivoine 100ml EDP £92 from www.theperfumeshop.com

Prada Paradoxe 90mls EDP £118 from www.theperfumeshop.com

FAME Blooming Pink, New Collector's Edition by Paco Rabanne 80ml EDP £118 from www.theperfumeshop.com

Narciso Rodriguez Eau de Parfum Poudrée 90ml EDP from www.johnlewis.com

YVES SAINT LAURENT
BLACK
OPIUM

Narciso Rodriguez For Her Musc Noir Rose Eau de Parfum 100ml EDP for £86.70 from www.johnlewis.com

Chloe Nomade £66 (75ML) from The Perfume Shop online at www.theperfumeshop.com

Black Opium Yves Saint Laurent Black Opium EDP. From £56, 30ML www.theperfumeshop.com

Danse Étoilée by Grace de Monaco 100ml EDP £220 from www.harrods.com

Edeniste Lifeboost Dream £68 from www.edeniste.com

Beauty, Style & Wellness for Spring

The very best in beauty devices, supplements & style for the season

TRINITY+
NUFACE
TARGETED FACIAL TONING KIT

croma
pure HA

DEEP SLEEP MODE

NUFACE
AQUA GEL
SILK CRÈME

HUSH & HUSH
DeeplyRooted
omotes hair
owth
Creates a
healthy scalp
Increases shi
Adds volume
and density

Viviscal
Hair Growth Programme
The most clinically researched brand
Maximum Strength Hair Growth Supplement
Helps maintain normal healthy hair growth from within
60 Tablets Food Supplement

NuFACE® TRINITY+ Starter Kit Smart Facial Toning Device, RRP £385 www.currentbody.com

Sensica Sensilight Pro - the ultimate in pain-free hair removal https://sensica.co.uk/

Happy Mammoth Deep Sleep Mode https://eu.happymammoth.com/

Mini Gun Massager £71.99 from www.wahl.co.uk

Croma Skincare range including Pure HA £75 from https://uk.cromaskincareshop.com/face-masks/pure-ha/

Grown Alchemist 100% natural skincare range www.grownalchemist.com

Starpowa Snooze gummies https://starpowa.com/

Hush & Hush wonderful hair care range https://hushandhush.co.uk/

Viviscal effective hair growth programme https://www.viviscal.co.uk/

Hux excellent range of effective supplements https://huxhealth.com/

Taking Shape Natural Garden Kimono and and figure flattering swimsuit https://takingshape.com/UK/

The Diamond Store Sustainable Diamond Pendant www.thediamondstore.co.uk

Ananda Soul beautiful jewellery – item shown "My Inner Truth necklace https://anandasoul.com/

A Trip Back in Time with Range Rover

Have you ever wanted to embrace your romantic heroine alter ego and wake up in a majestic National Trust property, stroll through expansive grounds and take lunch in a beautiful historic dining room? This is actually possible at the three Historic House Hotels, all of which were donated to the National Trust - Middlethorpe Hall, Hartwell House and Bodysgallen Hall, and all are featured here in this issue.

What's more, each stay, meal, and spa experience support the National Trust. Under the agreement, all annual profits generated from the three hotel operations directly support the Trust's ongoing work. The hotels operate as a self-sufficient commercial hotel operation under the existing management of Historic House Hotels. So, you're not only able to enjoy a wonderful experience, but are helping preserve some of our most treasured historic buildings too.

We thought a road trip would be the perfect way to explore two of these wonderful properties – Hartwell House and Middlethorpe Hall, and in terms of choosing the perfect vehicle for this adventure, it had to be the majestic new Range Rover Ingenium 3.0 litre 6-cylinder 510HP Turbocharged Petrol PHEV (Automatic) All Wheel Drive. A perfect match in not only its majesty but patriotic and eco-credentials too.

Eye-catchingly awesome, the Range Rover came in stunning SV guise in a unique Sunrise Copper satin finish, set off beautifully with Gloss Black features such as its roof, wheels and brake calipers. The SV Intrepid interior was a masterclass in elegant ergonomics, in classic Light Cloud and Cinder Grey, complemented by Satin Black ceramic controls. It's rare to find an interior as tasteful and high quality as this. Of course, being a Range Rover, it came with a host of state-of-the-art tech, safety, performance and entertainment features, highlights being SV metal plated elements, Terrain Response 2, an amazingly clear 3D surround camera, Wireless Apple CarPlay®, 13.1" Touchscreen, heated steering wheel, sliding panoramic roof, and even illuminated seat belt buckles.

Practical and eco-conscious at heart, this all-new Range Rover provides electrified performance with a choice of new Extended Range PHEV Powertrains. Using the "Always Be Charged" (ABC) Principle ensures it's possible to experience the best of PHEV features such as Predictive Energy Optimisation, great fuel economy as well as highlighting the USP's such as driving in low range in EV.

In simple terms, this means you can complete around 75% of your journey using hushed electric-only power, and for longer journeys, benefit from a total driving range of 740km (460 miles) in real-world conditions using the PHEV features. This is in stark contrast to the often highly limiting sub-300 miles range of many others.

Welcome

RANGE ROVER
KM72 OUA

High tech to the max, you can make the most of the plug-in hybrid using the connectivity options delivered by the comprehensive Land Rover Remote app. These include Cabin Pre-Conditioning, which can be activated while the car is plugged in and charging, enabling you to pre-warm or pre-cool you Range Rover ahead of journeys, all via the convenience of a smartphone.

You can also manage a suite of PHEV-related Timed Charging functions, including Immediate Charging – which commences battery charging immediately, Low-Cost Hours Only – when plugged in, priority is given to charging during a specific time period (for instance, when energy costs are at their lowest) and Smart Charging – the car's intelligent charging system will charge as efficiently as possible based on the planned departure time set by the driver. In conjunction with the pre-conditioning function, it will begin charging at the most cost-effective time.

Something important to us on our historic house road trip taking us from the Hampshire coast right up to Northumberland, was ease of charging when away from home. We needn't have feared as we discovered Land Rover PHEV uses a Combined Charging System (CCS) making it compatible with a good variety of charging points of varying speed. The Range Rover came with its own AC charging cable too.

Our journey in the Range Rover was smooth, seamless and we arrived after a 5-hour stretch remarkably refreshed still. It really is the perfect vehicle for long journeys – affording command position excellent visibility, supreme cabin comfort, effortless performance, and of course ample space for luggage of any kind.

Our first stop was Hartwell House in Buckinghamshire, with fascinating royal connections, and continuing on to Middlethorpe Hall, close to the fine city of York, before heading to our northernmost point, spectacular Bamburgh Castle – which fans of The Last Kingdom will know. They have an exhibition on now of some of the costumes and props used in The Last Kingdom, and for the new Seven Kings Must Die.

For further information on the all-new Range Rover visit: https://www.landrover.co.uk/vehicles/new-range-rover/index.html

Middlethorpe Hall -
https://www.middlethorpe.com/

Hartwell House
https://www.hartwell-house.com/

Bamburgh Castle
https://www.bamburghcastle.com/

RANGE ROVER
0 miles
EV Range
0%
AUTO

Toyota C-HR

Hailed as the urban SUV that leaves ordinary behind, Toyota's super-stylish C-HR is a mid-size eye-catching model that's a delight to drive. Practical too it offers the versatility to use either electric energy or a combination of petrol and electric power to fully optimise performance, meaning you can drive the way you always have.

Refreshingly stylistically different, the Toyota C-HR's striking angular looks set it apart from the crowd and hint at its ample performance and driver engagement. It looks like it will be fun and indeed is! But it's also super-easy to live with, economical, eco-conscious and in-credibly well built, and has the reassurance of Toyota's 10-year guarantee.

Slip inside and you'll find a cabin that's as artfully designed as the exterior, with high quality, durable materials and ergonomically placed, intuitive controls. The seats are supportive and feature diamond patterns that lend a little prestige. Lining the interior, soft-touch sur-faces are paired with contrasting gloss black inserts to create a contemporary feel. Then as day fades, the mood changes, and you are bathed in the soft blue glow of ambient lighting.

Being a Toyota, of course the C-HR is as tech rich as cars come. Owners will appreciate MyT Connected Services which include MyT Multimedia and MyT App. Each suite is host to its own set of features, designed to make driving safer and more fun, whether you are in-side or outside your vehicle. Through MyT Connected Services, you'll have access to real-time updates such as speed camera warnings and online service booking. In addition, you'll have the ability to connect your phone to your car to enjoy your favourite apps directly through the infotainment screen. Clever stuff indeed.

The Toyota C-HR also has some of the most sophisticated safety technologies in the world. Highlights include Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA-B) - when you back out of a parking space, rear-mounted sensors identify vehicles approaching from the left or right, warning you and then applying the brakes to avoid a collision. Also, there's Simple Intelligent Parking Assist (S-IPA) which helps you to steer your Toyota smoothly into a parking space or garage. All you do is provide the necessary acceleration and braking while the car parks itself. And, Intelligent Clearance Sonar with Automatic Braking which by using an array of sensors to create a 360° picture, detects objects around the vehicle, and provides an audible warning before applying the brakes to avoid a collision.

There are several trim grades, all of which are comprehensive even as standard. Even entry level models feature 17" Silver alloy wheels (5-double-spoke), Toyota Safety Sense 2 incl Pre-Collision System with Cyclist Detection, Day and Night-time Pedestrian Detection, Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC), Lane Trace Assist (LTA), Automatic High beam (AHB) & Road Sign Assist (RSA), 8" touchscreen with Toyota Touch® 2 media system with Smartphone In-tegration, including Apple CarPlay and Android Auto™, 6 speakers, DAB & Bluetooth® con-nectivity, wi-fi & voice recognition, a reversing camera, Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) and much more. The top GR Sport grade features 19" Black machined-face alloy wheels, bi-tone paint, GR SPORT Badges & scuff plates, GR SPORT Stabilisers, 3-spoke perforated leather steering wheel with red stitching, tinted LED adaptive headlights and more.

Performance wise, this is a super car to drive, highly responsive, with ample power, instant acceleration, and precise steering. The recently introduced 2.0 litre Hybrid powertrain is equally at home on the motorway, or local B-roads.

The Toyota C-HR is a cracking car that offers the compelling combination of striking good looks, performance, quality, advanced tech, and practicality. Not forgetting eco-creds too.

For further information visit: https://www.toyota.co.uk/

Volvo V60 Cross Country

We make no apologies for being avid Volvo fans here are KCR towers. Few if any car manufac-turers are doing more than this marque in creating vehicles which are as well built, beautifully designed, incredibly practical, eco-conscious, great to drive and of course safe. The V60 Cross Country has to be one of our favourite models and one we couldn't wait to have on test.

As the promotional copy tells is, this is a ready-for-anything estate – built for wherever life takes you. Don't be fooled by its elegant lines - it means business and features a raft of tech-nology such as all-wheel drive, Off Road mode, high ground clearance and Hill Descent Control to provide the sure-footedness of a mountain goat – with superb traction, grip, and safety, leav-ing you to simply focus on enjoying the drive. Whatever the weather and roads have to throw at you, the Volvo V60 Cross Country can more than cope and safely take you wherever you want to be.

Economical, and created with the environment in mind, The V60 Cross Country is a mild hybrid which means it recovers energy produced when braking and stores it in a 48V battery. When this energy is used, fuel consumption and tailpipe emissions are both reduced. Many of the materials used are sustainable too.

Viewed first hand, the V60 Cross Country is generally hailed as the best-looking estate of its class (with only the larger V90 coming close). This appeal continues inside where you'll dis-cover a cabin that really sets the bar in terms of style, substance, ergonomics, comfort, and space. It's also highly versatile too, with a good number of loading and seating configuration options. There are some lovely touches too – such as a stunning handcrafted gear shifter in genuine Swedish crystal is made exclusively for Volvo by Orrefors. Plus, it's light, bright, and airy thanks to a panoramic roof which lets light flood in, creating a natural, spacious feel for everyone in the cabin.

Today's Volvos come with a raft of state-of-the-art info/entertainment tech to enhance your and your passengers in car experience. Features include Volvo's Digital Services Package which conveniently harmonises you, your V60 Cross Country, and your digital life. Google is built in – so you get favourite apps like Google Assistant, Google Maps, and more on Google Play right in your car for a helpful, personalised, and seamless driving experience. There's also the Volvo Cars app too which enables locking and unlocking, cabin pre-cleaning and cabin heating or cooling.

Other cabin features include a head-up display showing driving speed and navigation on the windshield. These help you keep focused by allowing you to watch your speed, follow turn-by-turn navigation, and more without having to look down and lose focus on the road. The bright-ness of the head-up display adapts automatically to the light conditions, and you can set the system to suit your own personal preferences. There's also an advanced air purifier in the Vol-vo V60 Cross Country which helps you and your passengers enjoy better and healthier air quali-ty.

Being a Volvo, safety is paramount, and the V60 Cross Country is supremely equipped. High-lights here include Cross traffic alert, Blind spot information system (BLIS) and lane drift detec-tion, plus four cameras which provide a 360° view and flank sensors increasing awareness of objects at the side of the car, to help you park confidently even in confined spaces. Volvo's V60 Cross Country is a fantastic all rounder providing class-leading space, safety, capa-bility, comfort and style. It's a car you'd be thrilled to own.

Visit: https://www.volvocars.com/uk/cars/v60-cross-country/